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I.

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BY THE GATE OF THE SEA

BY

DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY

AUTHOR OF 'JOSEPH'S COAT' 'A LIFE'S ATONEMENT' 'COALS OF FIRE' ETC.



IN TWO VOLUMES

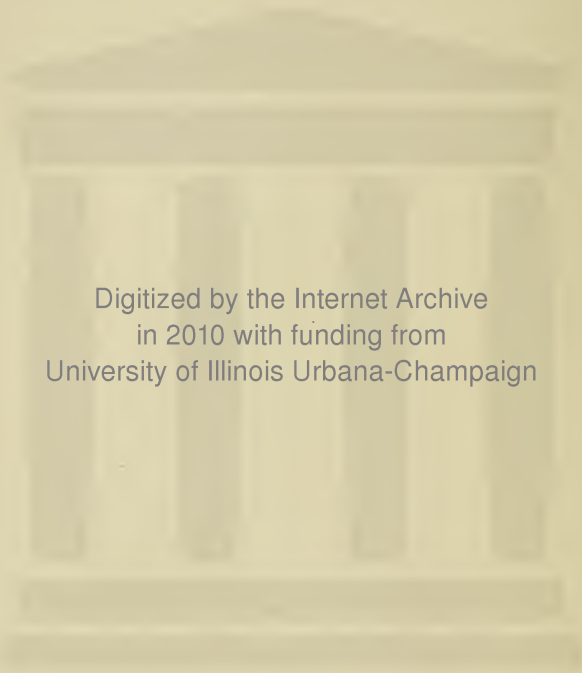
VOL. I.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1883

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TO

WALTER BESANT, M.A.

THERE was once a time—unless many books do lie—when old artists met young ones without jealousy and young ones sought their elders without fear, because the bond of a common hope was strong, and all workers in art were brothers. Nature brings not back the mastodon, nor we those times; yet in giving this book to the public I am impelled to dedicate it to a delightful elder brother whom I have never seen, but whose manly, genial, and helpful voice has been long familiar to me.

D. CHRISTIE MURRAY.

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BY THE GATE OF THE SEA.

CHAPTER I.

It was in the days of the last dynasty of the dandies, and anybody under the age of thirty who spoke with the accent of Christian, pagan, or man could scarcely be accounted a gentleman.

‘She is a faine creachaw,’ said the Captain; ‘a dayvilish faine creachaw—an exceptionally faine creachaw.’

The Lieutenant echoed the Captain’s encomium, and the pair struck into for-

midable attitudes at the porch of the theatre. Little knots of the country people gathered on the other side of the road and surveyed the two gentlemen, who were attired in evening dress, and knew themselves to be objects of interest and admiration. M. Gibus had just given to the world his famous invention, and the two military gentlemen, who were in the van and foremost of fashion, had adopted it. The Captain was fully self-possessed under the admiring gaze of the yokels, but the Lieutenant so far yielded to a natural weakness as to take off his hat and flatten it against his breast. It was done with an admirable air of absent-minded habit, and it amazed the bystanders. The Lieutenant felt that he made a telling figure, but when he released the springs and the hat fled back

into its former shape he was betrayed into a smile of triumph at the sensation he created, and from that moment he became self-conscious and embarrassed, insomuch that his legs—which were commonly his strong point—became a trouble to him. The passing by of a friend at such a moment seemed almost providential, and the Lieutenant sprang into the gaslit street with renewed composure.

‘Hollo, Tregarthen! How d’ye do? Quite an age since we saw you, old fellow. Here’s Harcourt. Have you seen Miss Churchill? She’s a faine creachaw, an exceptionally faine creachaw, ’pon my word.’

The Captain smiled at this echo of his own conversational felicities. The Lieu-

tenant, as he knew, was a fellow of no originality.

‘No,’ said Tregarthen; ‘I haven’t seen her. Who is she?’

‘Actress,’ replied the Lieutenant, successfully imitating the Captain’s drawl. ‘Playing here now. Dayvilish faine creachaw, ’pon m’honour. Come in and look at her. Harcourt and I have a box here. No ladies with us. Doesn’t matter that yaw not dressed. Come along, there’s a good fellow.’

The new-comer allowed himself to be persuaded, and the three entered the theatre together. It was a small house, but too large for its audience, and all its tinsel was shabby as well as tawdry, and most of the gas globes around the dress circle were chipped and broken. An impossible old

Adam doddered and dithered off the stage, thumping the boards with a staff like the prop of a clothes-line, and a burly Orlando followed him with his calves in his ankles. Then the scene shifted, and on came a dissipated Touchstone in second-hand garments, and a dowdy Celia, and between them Rosalind in doublet and hose. ‘Oh, Jupiter!’ sighed Rosalind; ‘how weary are my spirits!’ Something knocked at the heart of Cornet Tregarthen. He had never before listened to such a voice, and its tones went through him like a delicate fire. Touchstone jarred in with his answer, and Rosalind spoke again: ‘I could find it in my heart to disgrace my man’s apparel, and to cry like a woman.’ It was downright pitiful, and yet there was a touch of comedy in it. ‘But

I must comfort the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to petticoat.' The comedy shone out there with tender brilliance. 'Therefore, courage, good Aliena!' To one listener there was such a womanly courage, solicitude, and friendship in the phrase and in the lovely voice that spoke it, that his eyes dimmed and his heart stuck in his throat. Cornet Tregarthen was but two-and-twenty, and youth is sometimes impressionable.

Rosalind, in spite of the fatigue which evidently sat upon her, was as straight and lithe as the stalk of a lily, and she had a voice like a silver bell. The Cornet was short-sighted, and her features were dimly seen, but he fancied them lovely. An older and more experienced man might

have been excused for the fancy, with such a voice and such a figure on which to base it.

His companions expressed their admiration for the actress in their own way, but he scarcely heard them. Even when Rosalind was absent from the stage he had but inattentive ears for the Captain and the Lieutenant, and he answered them when they addressed him with an absent 'Yes' or 'No,' or a dreamy nod.

'Tregarthen,' said the Captain, 'has gone spoons on the Churchill.'

The Lieutenant nodded and booked the statement for future use. Its chaste simplicity and directness charmed him, and he resolved to repeat it to Rylands at headquarters if he saw him before Harcourt did.

The play was over, the curtain was down, and the sweet voice dwelt in Tregarthen's ears. 'Bid me farewell,' said the sweet voice, in the last words of the epilogue. It sounded personal to him, and there was a pleasant gentle sadness in it.

'When do you join us at headquarters, Tregarthen?' asked the Captain. 'You must find it most intollably dull where yaw staying, eh?'

'I am ordered to rejoin to-morrow,' said Tregarthen. 'Hazel tells me that Colonel Pollard will be there. I have not seen him yet.'

'No,' said the Captain, 'Old Polly's been on sick leave at Etretat—cursed little village somewhere on the Continent. You'll like him. Jolly old bird is Polly. Tells

thunderin' good yarn, Polly does. Mostly 'bout himself, y' know—self an' ladies, y' know—that sort thing, but thunderin' good they are. Sly old dayvl Polly is, uncommon.'

'I shall meet him to-morrow,' said Tregarthen, somewhat absently.

'He's a bit of a crib-biter, too, Polly is,' said the Lieutenant, 'bit of a martinet, y' know; but everybody gets on with him in the long run, don't they, Harcourt?'

'He's a cursed good old sort, is Polly,' the Captain replied with emphasis. 'You'll like him no end, Tregarthen. Night-night, my boy. Glad to have met you.'

Tregarthen took train and reached his own quarters, and his thoughts dwelt a good deal about Miss Churchill by the way. To

his mind she was the first real artist he had seen upon the stage, and for the time at least her voice had taken him captive. Shakespeare for once had found an actress worthy to interpret him, and surely no other man who had ever lived could have created a part sweet and bright enough for so exquisite a creature to play in. He smoked a cigar in company with his own agreeably fluttered fancies, and then he went to bed and slept soundly and forgot them. He was not nearly so much impressed with Miss Churchill in the morning, and though she touched his thoughts pleasantly once or twice he got through the day's business with no great hindrance from her.

Late afternoon found him at headquarters with little more than time to dress for dinner.

Lieutenant-Colonel Pollard had resumed the active command of the corps and took the head place at the mess-table. Tregarthen was presented, and formed a poor opinion of the bloated old warrior, who met him with a disreputable jest, and told straightway an objectionable story which grated on the Cornet's ears. When the real business of the dinner began the manners of the officer in command were not at all to the taste of the young gentleman, who was possibly fastidious. The Colonel's eyes goggled and his face crimsoned as he strained over the table to get at his soup, and his wicked speech was half choked by wheezings and pantings. He gobbled as a gentleman ought not to gobble, and he drank as a gentleman ought not to drink. When

dinner was over the naughty old man told shameless tales of his youth and manhood, and Tregarthen, who had been bred to reverence old age and to think purity as desirable and lovely in a man as in a woman, found the evening almost insupportable.

‘Somebody ought to put a stop to all that,’ he told Captain Harcourt, after dinner, to that gallant officer’s great astonishment. ‘In a society of gentlemen the thing is intolerable. We serve a Lady,’ he added, with the generous pomposity of youth, ‘and that of itself might teach us better manners.’

The Captain stared at him with an amazement he took no pains to disguise. A touch of contempt was discernible even in his wonder.

‘Shouldn’t advaise yah talk laike that,’

he said. 'Cursed inconvenient have yang fellahs offerin' that sort opinion in the army.'

'I shall make it my business,' returned Tregarthen in some heat at the Captain's contemptuous wonder, 'to represent to Colonel Pollard that at least one of his officers finds his style of conversation irksome, and thinks it unbecoming.'

'Don't be an ass, Tregarthen,' said Captain Harcourt. Tregarthen inclined his head stiffly, and marched away. The Captain told one or two of his closest friends the story of the youngster's unaccountable craze, and they all agreed that he was a prig and a greenhorn. 'Polly,' said Harcourt, 'is about the best sort in the service. Idea of young fool like thaat pretending dictate officers old enough be his father.'

Captain Harcourt's friends concurred with him, and the story of Tregarthen's presumption spread rapidly throughout the regiment. Next day he was treated with evident coldness, and some of his brother officers who had hitherto been on friendly terms with him took pains to avoid him. He was not unpopular to begin with, but it was the general sense of the corps that the sort of insolence he had shown deserved rebuke. He must be made to see at once that this was not the tone to take.

That evening there came a time when the conversation at the head of the table was animated and loud. The youngsters at the lower end smoked and listened and got little good by listening. It was nothing less than the reputation of a lady which so ex-

cited the seniors. One man held out against the rest and avowed his belief that the lady was chaste as ice and pure as snow. The others naturally laughed at him, for the woman he defended was an actress, and in those days—it may be better now—an actress was anybody's fair game at a mess-table.

‘Wait a bit,’ said the Colonel, with his wicked bronchial old chuckle. ‘I’ll tell you a story *à propos*.’

Everybody listened and the Colonel told his story. It redounded infinitely to his own credit as a man of gallantry and infinitely to the discredit of the lady, whose personal charms he sang and whose character he stole.

‘Now, who do you think that was?’

asked the Colonel. Nobody answered, and the fat old *roué* re-lit his cigar and gazed about him with a look of twinkling triumph. ‘None other,’ he said, after this pause, ‘than our chaste young friend, Miss Churchill. What do you say to that?’

It happened at this moment that the Colonel’s twinkling eyes looked full into the eyes of Tregarthen, who was bending forward a little at the bottom end of the table and watching his commanding officer with an expression of saturnine disdain. The black-browed Cornet half rose in his place.

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ he said, slowly and distinctly. ‘You seemed to address your question to me. If you press me for an answer I must give you one.’

It was generally felt that the hour had

come, and the assembled gentlemen braced themselves to support authority. If the Colonel had understood the situation he would probably have snubbed the querist by leaving him unseen and unanswered. But, being taken by surprise, he rapped out ‘Well, sir?’ and stared at the intruder with a look half surprise, half anger.

‘I am to answer your question, sir?’ said Tregarthen. ‘I think then, sir, that no gentleman could have told such a story, and that no assemblage of gentlemen could hear it without marking their sense of its cowardice, its brutality, and its general offensiveness.’

The Colonel bounced to his feet, and sent a dozen wineglasses flying. Major, adjutant, captains, lieutenants, and cornets

all leapt up wildly. Tregarthen resumed his seat, and was calm amidst this tempest of his own raising.

‘Retire to your quarters, sir,’ stormed the Colonel. ‘Consider yourself under arrest, sir.’ He stood puffing and snorting for a moment whilst the offender arose, saluted, and left the mess-room. ‘Resume your seats, gentlemen,’ he said then, and all sat down in awkward silence.

A general sense of relief was felt five minutes later when, after a muttered word or two to his neighbours at right and left, the Colonel arose and withdrew, followed by Major Eykin and Captain Harcourt. Clamour ensued, and nothing was talked of but the awful and unheard-of incident of the evening.

Tregarthen in the meantime walked to his quarters, and returned the salutes offered him by barrack loungers and sentries on the way. It was summer time, and the twilight lingered softly. An odour of mignonette stole pleasantly through the open casement of his chamber, and he seated himself on a couch near the window, and looked at the darkening zenith as he smoked. If he were not altogether as placid as he seemed—and he made it a point of honour to be outwardly tranquil even in his own sole company—he was less disturbed than might have been predicted of a man so young after his share in such a scene.

‘The man’s a blackguard,’ he said quietly. ‘Perhaps I was an ass to tell him so—and yet I don’t know. That sort of thing ought

not to be allowed to go on amongst gentlemen, and if it does it is clearly some one's duty to put a foot upon it.'

He threw away the stump of his cigar, lit a new one, and stretched himself along the couch. In that position he smoked until he could see nothing in the gathering darkness but the little point of light an inch or two from his nose.

Then steps sounded on the stairs and there was a knock at the door. He called to the knocker to enter, and two men came in and looked about them uncertainly in the gloom. There was a light upon the stairs without, and he recognised his visitors.

'Mr. Tregarthen?' said one.

'At your service, sir,' he answered

gravely. 'Be seated, gentlemen. Allow me to light the lamp.'

He moved quietly about the room, found his lamp, set it upon the table, and, having lighted it, resumed his place. But seeing that his visitors remained standing, he arose again and faced them.

'Colonel Pollard,' began Major Eykin, with great solemnity, 'having consulted Captain Harcourt and myself, has decided to meet the unusual occurrence of this evening by a step which is at least as unusual, but which seems to be called for by the circumstances of the case.'

'Cisely. Quait so,' said Captain Harcourt.

'The result of that decision is,' pursued the Major, 'that we are here to demand a

meeting. Colonel Pollard entirely waives the question of rank, feeling as he does that nothing short of the course he proposes can vindicate his honour.'

'And you concur?' inquired the Cornet.

'Zactly,' said Captain Harcourt. 'We concur.'

'I must ask you to allow me to differ from you, gentlemen,' said Tregarthen. 'I do not see how it is in any way possible for Colonel Pollard to vindicate his honour.'

'We will not trouble you, Mr. Tregarthen,' said the Major, 'for any expression of your opinion.' He spoke with infinite dryness. 'We will merely ask you to nominate an hour for the meeting and to name your friend.'

'I cannot oblige you, gentlemen,' re-

turned Tregarthen. ‘Colonel Pollard has wantonly and publicly defamed the character of a lady, and I do not see how even a public apology and withdrawal could help him.’

The Colonel’s emissaries looked at each other with uplifted eyebrows.

‘Are we to understand,’ asked the Major, ‘that you decline to meet Colonel Pollard?’

‘I do not see how the breach of law which Colonel Pollard proposes can console him for a former misdemeanour.’

‘Bay Jove, y’know,’ cried Harcourt, ‘the fellow’s mad’s a March hare.’

‘I am not mad, most noble Festus,’ said Tregarthen, bowing.

The two military gentlemen were

strangers to the volume from which he quoted, and they looked at each other again with a glance that said plainly that the mark had been hit.

‘I will fight in the Queen’s cause,’ said the Cornet, ‘but in no other.’ Here was another touch of the bombast natural to ardent youth, but Trevelyan’s aspect was calm, and it was not difficult to see that he meant what he said and was likely to abide by it.

‘I do not think, sir,’ said Major Eykin, ‘that you properly appreciate the situation, or the alternative that lies before you.’

‘May I so far trespass on your kindness,’ asked the imperturbable young man, ‘as to beg you to instruct me?’

‘You have offered to the virtual head of

your regiment a public and most shameful insult,' returned the Major in considerable heat. 'He waives all consideration of his rank, and stoops to demand a personal encounter in vindication of his outraged honour. Stoops, sir!—understand me, sir—I say—stoops to demand a personal encounter. That encounter you refuse. Do you know what construction gentlemen will put upon your refusal?'

'I await instruction, sir,' answered Tregarthen.

'Very well,' said the Major, grown sardonic on a sudden, 'you shall have it. It is open for you to offer an abject apology and to exchange—if you are still inclined to ornament the service.'

'Is that the only alternative course you

see?' inquired the Cornet. 'Pardon me, gentlemen. We are all naturally a little heated by the events of the evening. May I suggest that we attempt a milder humour?'

'The thing, sir,' declared the Major, 'stands beyond discussion. You aggravate an original offence by the tone you choose to take.'

'Permit me,' said this amazing subaltern. 'Is it not at least equally open to Colonel Pollard, with myself, to offer an apology and to exchange—if he is still inclined to ornament the service?'

Major Eykin swung round upon his heel and marched to the door. There he turned abruptly.

'One more chance, sir! Do you apologise or fight?'

'Neither, sir,' returned Tregarthen.

The Major tore the door open and disappeared. Tregarthen ran forward and held the door whilst Harcourt left the room. Their steps died off into silence, and the presumptuous young man was left to his own reflections, which began to be disturbed and bitter. He found little fault with himself as yet, but he had learned in what light his conduct was likely to be regarded by the men amongst whom he had desired to live. He had acted deliberately, and was not in the least disposed to be ashamed of himself. Men of middle age can sometimes school themselves to hold a candle to the devil. They learn the wisdom of the world and are not greatly inclined to champion their own notions. They feel no dishonour in toleration. But

with two-and-twenty all this may be different, and happily it sometimes is. Quixote grows into Sancho Panza, as often as not, before he comes to forty year. That may or may not be sorrowful, but to be born Sancho would surely seem something of a pity.

Contrary to Tregarthen's expectation, no immediate action followed upon his refusal of the Major's ultimatum. A day or two went by and he was simply disregarded. No brother officer came near him ; he heard nothing about the continuance of his arrest or its discontinuance, and after waiting in his own quarters until the sense of tedium became too marked to be easily endured, he wrote a careful little missive to the Colonel requesting to know what form the charge against him would take and when it would

be preferred. In response to these inquiries came a letter from the Adjutant informing him that the character of the charge was under consideration, that he would receive ample warning of the date on which it would be preferred, and that he was in the meantime to regard himself as being released from active participation in regimental duties. Following on this came another letter (signed by every officer of the regiment with the exception of the Colonel, the names following each other in order of seniority) urging upon him the extreme desirableness of a withdrawal from the regiment, and suggesting in terms of studied politeness that even the service at large might manage to get along without him.

This second epistle Tregarthen left un-

answered, but he appealed to the Adjutant to know whether he might regard himself as being provisionally at liberty, and being answered in the affirmative he set out for London. He found his story there before him, garbled, as such stories are. He had drunkenly insulted his Colonel, had thrown a wineglass at him—in milder versions had only thrown the contents of the glass—in versions even stronger had used a decanter as a missile.

He suffered much heart-burning before the court-martial summoned to decide his case was appointed, and if he had expectations of support from any court of honour they were dashed to pieces. The assemblage of officers and gentlemen who investigated the history of the quarrel were unani-

mously against him. They were also unanimous in their recommendation that he should quit the service. This, with the obstinacy natural to him, he utterly declined to do, and the upshot of the whole matter was that, when all due formalities had been accomplished, the contumacious youth was deprived of his commission, and was returned to the world with a character more damaged than it deserved to be. Discipline must be maintained, and there is no doubt that if cornets were accustomed publicly to rebuke their colonels for breaches of good-breeding the British military service would enter on a phase of some novelty.

Tregarthen went home disgusted and embittered. The only career he cared for was closed to him for good and all, and

even in later years, when experience brought him more wisdom than two-and-twenty can commonly boast of, he believed himself to have been unjustly used.

It seemed necessary to relate this episode of his career for two reasons. It strikes a keynote of character, and it furnishes an explanation for his after-mode of life.

CHAPTER II.

It was about the time of the events just recorded that Mr. Ronald Marsh dawned upon London. There are various ways of dawning: the grey way is perhaps esteemed the most prosperous, but Mr. Marsh dawned in vivid splendours, and his glories at the beginning were inclined to be tempestuous. London is a biggish place to dawn upon, and the luminary whose rays pierce every cranny and corner of it must rise high and shine bright indeed. Now Mr. Marsh made no pretence (though he knew himself a sun

of the first magnitude) to shine upon the vulgar. The fog of their understanding was obviously too dense for him. He did not even count upon illumining the whole of the polite world, as yet. There are men and women in the highest circles who never get a thrill of warmth or a ray of conscious light out of *Æschylus* or *Shakespeare*. Not that Mr. Marsh thought much of *Æschylus* or *Shakespeare*, but they had passed, up till now, as amongst the earth's greatest, and they were well enough in the way of parallel or illustration. He was content for the present to be seen and known of few. He would have been content, in a way, not to be seen or known at all—at least, he had the modesty to say so—to shine unheeded, and to rejoice in his own strength and radiance.

He dawned, then, in fitful splendours, and his signs and portents were first noted in the house of Lady Marguerite Capucine, where he appeared in unstarched linen and apparel of strange device, and with a head of hair like a disorderly halo. He had no actual companions, but two or three satellites accompanied him, rising at his risings and setting at his settings. Their merely physical aspect was like his own; they wore their hair at as great a length and in as picturesque disorder; their sombreros and their cloaks were as brigandish as their leader's. They thought great things of themselves and of each other; but they swore by the Leader and proclaimed him the Emancipator of Human Thought. They used to say, with every evidence of sincerity,

that when the Leader gave his poems to the world the pillars of a worn-out system would be shaken.

The Leader could occasionally be prevailed upon to repeat or read a mere fragmentary extract from his work, and the appetite of his followers grew with what it fed on. In these excerpts the world was called upon to break its fetters—not particularised with clearness—and there were mightily sonorous passages about the Degraded Gods and the need for their complete abolition.

Nobody can live always at extremest high pressure, and Mr. Ronald Marsh went about sometimes quite like an ordinary person. At these times he consorted for the most part with people who were literary, artistic, and theatrical. Bohemia is a

sparsely-peopled country now. One or two men who really knew its crowded haunts and its few solitudes, its cheerful highways and sad byways, wrote about it and made it familiar to the world. Then came the inevitable cloud of imitators and pretenders, and made poor old Bohemia an impossible place to live in any longer. 'Its name is so cheapened that the very mention of it has a ring of sham sentiment and sham mirth; even its tried gold has been so lacquered that it looks like pinchbeck. But there was a Bohemia worth knowing even so late as Ronald Marsh's day, and the great young man sometimes strayed into it and tried to feel as if he were native there.

There was, and is, a dingy back room in one of the oldest houses in the Strand, a

mere box of an apartment, in which, by crowding themselves uncomfortably, ten men of average breadth of beam can sit around the clumsy centre table. Half one side of the room is occupied by a window, but the smoke-encrusted wall of a neighbouring building rises within two yards of it, and a gruesome twilight reigns within the apartment even at noontide. There, once a week, in the days of which I write, spectral-looking figures sat and held high converse on books and pictures and the drama, and on the men and women who wrote, or painted, or played. The air was heavy with tobacco-smoke and the scent of strong potables, and a new comer, entering from the fresher air of the Strand, had some ado to make out the inmates of the room.

The spectral nine welcomed the poet with grave voices, and wedged themselves closer to make room for him. The Leader took his seat with an air of modesty, and the spectral nine began to chaff him.

‘I am sorry to tell you, Mr. Marsh,’ said one, speaking from the cloudiest corner, ‘that the petition yet awaits a signature.’

‘What petition?’ asked the poet, removing his sombrero, and passing a hand of unusual whiteness through his auburn locks.

‘*The* petition,’ responded the other, bending forward to be more impressive, and waving the smoke aside with one hand. ‘Signed by the crowned heads of Europe, the Pope of Rome, and the English Arch-

bishops, and now awaiting the signature of the Metropolitan of the Greek Church at Moscow.'

'I do not read the newspapers,' said the poet, daintily lighting a cigar. 'What is the object of the petition?'

'Gentlemen!' cried the man in the corner. 'I appeal to you: Is it not unfair for Mr. Marsh to feign ignorance on such a topic?'

'Unfair in the extreme,' said eight solemn voices. 'Disingenuous,' one added, when the grave murmurs had died away. They all echoed—'Disingenuous.'

'The distinguished personages already enumerated,' said the man in the corner, 'address their petition to you, sir, and entreat you not to smash things. They

dread the advent of your coming volume. They beseech you to spare the Christian faith, and to allow monarchical institutions a final chance.'

The poet smiled and caressed his shaven cheek with the tips of his fingers. Many a true word is spoken in jest, and the man in the corner was nearer the mark than he fancied.

'If the prayers of the great cannot move you,' pursued the man in the corner, 'you are a man, for you are poet—the greater includes the less—and you may be moved by the petitions of the lowly. I have a maiden aunt, a harmless creature who resides hard by, and clear-starches for a bishop. If you destroy the Church you take away her means of ^{*}livelihood. Smite the

lofty if you will, but spare the humble.
Spare my maiden aunt.'

All the solemn voices murmured, led by
a man in another corner, 'Spare, oh, spare
his maiden aunt!'

'A special fund shall be set apart, out
of the publisher's profits,' said the poet,
'and your maiden aunt shall be provided
for.'

'He unbends,' said one. 'He is human
after all. He can gleek upon occasion, like
the Athenian weaver.'

'Let us take him to the collective
bosom,' said the man in the corner. 'Let
us stand him drinks. Lorrimer, when the
glad child of the sun broke in upon us you
were in possession of the ear of the house.
Continue. Poet, be ^{*}silent. A harp less

varied than thine own awakes in praise of beauty.'

'Gentlemen,' said Mr. Lorrimer, who beamed rubicund and jovial through the smoke, 'she is a stunner. I do not speak inadvisedly or as one who has no knowledge. It was I who found her. She has the grace of Venus and the voice and figure of a what's-his-name. I have no pretence to classical attainments, gentlemen, and I wish that our gifted young friend could describe her for me.'

'We shall judge for ourselves when she makes her *début*,' said the man in the corner. 'But in the meantime, who is she? Where does she come from?'

'You shall know all I know,' said Mr. Lorrimer, with a superfluous appearance of

candour. ‘Burnley has bought a bit of fishing at a place called Lickey, down in Berkshire. Little bit of a place with little bit of a theatre, and the worst company I *ever* saw. Burnley asked me down, and of course, with nothing doing at the end of May, down I went. Went to the theatre first night. Play was, “As You Like It.” As *I* liked it, it was the most fearful rubbish ever staged. Even Shakespeare couldn’t live through that interpretation. But, begad, gentlemen, in walks Rosalind, and I thought I must be dreaming. Such a figure, such a voice, such a stage presence, such a style. Face not particularly pretty, but sweet and expressive, and all that sort of thing. Made me laugh, begad ; made me cry ; did what she wanted with me. I’ve been in the pro-

fession now for forty years, and I am not easily moved.'

'Wrong, Lorrimer! You are more easily moved than ever,' said the man in the corner. 'We all are. We cultivate the emotions until they master us more readily than they used. Gin unsweetened is the next best thing to the pursuit of an artistic calling. Take them both together and you are blest indeed. You can weep at any moment. Will you ring the bell, Lorrimer? Thank you. Waiter—gin unsweetened.'

'Well,' said Mr. Lorrimer, 'I've seen 'em all for forty years, and played to most of 'em; and, only give the new one a bit of practice, gentlemen, and she'll beat the lot of 'em. Into sticks,' he concluded, beating

the table two or three times with the palm of his hand—‘into sticks!’

‘What is this wonder’s name?’ asked the poet.

‘Her name is Churchill,’ said Mr. Lorrimer—‘Miss Churchill. And when the Siddonses and the Bracegirdles and the Oldfields and the Kellys and the Keeleys are forgotten, she will be remembered. She’s unequalled. There never was anything like her.’

‘The puff preliminary,’ said the man in the corner, ‘requires an art which only Lorrimer has mastered. Dramatic critics, hold up your hands. Five; and all big fish.’

‘I don’t want to puff this time,’ cried Lorrimer. ‘Wait till you see the lady,

gentlemen, and you'll say with me that no adverse criticism can get near her. I defy the crowd of you. And now, though I grieve to leave you, dear boys all, I must be off to rehearsal.'

Two men rose to allow him to unwedge himself from between the table and the wall. As he passed the poet he touched him on the shoulder and gave him an inviting backward nod. Mr. Marsh arose and followed him.

'Now *you're* a judge of acting,' said Mr. Lorrimer, when they were in the Strand. 'You're a judge of female beauty too. First dress rehearsal this afternoon. You shall just take a seat in the circle, my boy, and then you shall give me an opinion.'

The theatrical manager had not nearly

so high an opinion of Mr. Marsh's critical powers as the young gentleman himself enjoyed, nor had he, perhaps, even so high an opinion as he expressed, but he revered 'a nob,' and Mr. Marsh was undoubtedly a nob of the most influential order. The poet was hand-in-glove with Lady Marguerite Capucine, his sister-in-law, who had a good deal to do with artistic opinion in the upper circles. Neither she nor any other lady, however distinguished, could make or break the fortunes of any production of Mr. Lorrimer's, but the manager had an exalted idea of her usefulness, and the poet had the run of the house ; and was young enough to enjoy the satisfaction of taking off the glamour of theatrical performance by getting behind the scenes.

There were, perhaps, a dozen men and women sprinkled about the dusky house—two or three in the pit and the rest scattered over the dress circle—when the curtain rose and discovered Adam and Orlando. For those days, the revival was to be unusually magnificent and complete. The acting was competent, though a little old-fashioned and sombre till Rosalind came upon the stage. Miss Churchill bewitched the poet as she had bewitched the Cornet in the little country town, only, when *he* was charmed the poet felt it was his duty to be somewhat more charmed than a commonplace person could dream of being. He coined strange epithets wherewith to describe her to his friends, and at the fall of the curtain on the third act he made his way round to the

back of the stage. There he met Lorrimer, and fell on him with praises, tooth and nail.

‘My dear Lorrimer, a supernal performance! There’s something in it—a *je ne sais quoi*—a tenderness in chiding, a dignity in repose, a courtliness in badinage—one seeks in vain for words of enough aptness and delicacy and descriptive amplitude: but one is delighted—one is borne away. I must really make a point of being allowed to do the notice in *The Scourge*. They praise so rarely there that one will have a chance of making an impression. My dear Lorrimer, you have discovered a jewel. I must really make a point of asking to be presented. You must present me, Lorrimer, you must really.’

Lorrimer, consenting, led the way. Rosalind, in a fur cloak which reached to her toes, was standing, with a somewhat embarrassed air, looking up at a picture on the greenroom wall.

‘Permit me, Miss Churchill,’ said Lorrimer. ‘Mr. Ronald Marsh, the most charming of London’s poets.’

There are few things less pleasant, as every modest man knows, than to be praised effusively, and yet below one’s obvious merits.

‘Mr. Lorrimer flatters me,’ said the poet bowing.

‘Not at all,’ cried the manager, ‘not at all.’

The tall and stately Rosalind vouchsafed one glance to Mr. Ronald Marsh, offered

him something between a nod and a mutilated curtsey, and resumed the study of the picture on the wall. However much at her ease she might be on the stage, she had at present but a poor imitation of self-possession when off it. But the gentle flattery of ladies was the poet's social strong point, or so he fancied. Somebody called Lorrimer aside, and Mr. Marsh saw nothing better than to repeat the speech he had so recently spoken.

‘ A supernal performance, Miss Churchill. Really, believe me, quite a supernal performance. So sweet a tenderness in chiding—such a dignity in repose—such courtliness in badinage it has never been my happy lot to meet upon the English boards. I assure you, Miss Churchill, that one seeks in vain

for words of enough aptness and delicacy and descriptive amplitude. One is delighted, one is borne away.'

Before Mr Marsh had got more than half way through this speech Lorrimer had returned unheard, and stood with a broad grin at his elbow. The poet, encountering the manager's smile, read its meaning and blushed at detection. Miss Churchill, who had kept her eyes upon the picture whilst he spoke, looked round at him like a disguised lady in an old play.

'I am obliged to you, sir,' she said, with something of the accent of the stage. 'Excuse me, sir. My call.'

She walked to the greenroom door, at which the call-boy had indeed at that moment bawled her name. The call, how-

ever, was not for the stage. The boy handed her a letter, a formal-looking document, in a large blue cover, with a splashed seal of red wax. The actress, seeming, by a slight inclination of her head, to demand leave of the manager and the poet, broke the seal and, opening the letter, began to read. The poet watched her the while, and saw a blush rise beyond the line of necessary rouge upon her cheek. Looking up, she caught him in the act of staring at her, and with a curtsey she swept from the room.

Mr. Marsh felt that he had fared but poorly, and stood sucking at the nob of his walking-cane with a more vacuous aspect than a great man often wears. By-and-by, finding that Rosalind did not reappear, he

strolled back to the dress circle, where he lounged with upward glance and rested his auburn head upon his hand in the most approved poetic manner. He was so absorbed in thinking of what the other people in the dress circle were likely to think of him, that for awhile he did not notice that the curtain still lay between him and the long-since exploited and exploded fairyland of the stage. By-and-by the scattered denizens of the dress circle drew near each other and laid their heads together. Then Lorrimer appeared between the curtain and the floats as if in act to address the limited audience, but he retired without saying a word. In the front of the house arose a whisper—something was going wrong. Aroused by this conjecture, the

poet once more availed himself of the freedom his intimacy with the manager gave him, and sauntered behind the scenes. The florid Lorrimer was swearing like a Bedlamite. The ducal usurper, the banished duke, Jaques, Celia, Phœbe, and Orlando, stood about him, all in attitudes of more or less amazement.

‘What’s the matter, Lorrimer?’ asked the poet.

‘Matter?’ cried Lorrimer. ‘The jade’s off at the last minute, and this is all she leaves behind her.’

The poet took from the manager’s outstretched hand a note, and read this:—

‘Sir,—Circumstances have arisen which make it impossible that I should continue

my career upon the stage. I shall be happy to repay you for all expenses you may have incurred in my behalf. Pray communicate in respect to that matter with my lawyers, Messrs. Lowe and Carter, of Clement's Inn.

‘Yours very truly,

‘CLARA CHURCHILL.’

‘She can't mean it!’ cried Lorrimer, actually gasping. ‘I've spent three hundred pounds in money, and three thousand pounds in wit in advertising her. She wants more salary. That's what it is—she wants more salary. But, begad, since she's tried it on in this way’ (he mastered his rage so far as to be able to embroider it, as it were, with a touch of mock-heroics), ‘if that her jesses

were my dear heart-strings, I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind to prey at fortune.'

Mr. Ronald Marsh sighed audibly.

'Shakespeare crowds us all from the field of popular quotation,' he said inwardly. 'Had Lorrimer known it he might have found a passage far more appropriate in my Epithalamium.'

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Tregarthen found that his zeal for the reformation of mess-room manners had wrecked his military fortunes, he went home, and there buried himself among his books. Many, many years ago the Tregarthens, his forbears, had built for themselves a fortress for a dwelling-place, and the house had wasted away bit by bit like the other belongings of its owners, but had been modernised and added to every here and there, until it had grown and fallen into one of the oddest and most heterogeneous piles

in England. A man must be curiously moulded indeed if his character is in no way affected by the character of the house in which he is bred, and a good deal of the sentiment of the frowning, rambling, stately, yet half-ruined old house had found its way into Tregarthen.

His ancestors, for reasons of their own, had built their house upon an island, and this island faced the Cornish mainland on the one hand and the melancholy Atlantic on the other. The house stood high and bare for winter storms to rave at, and in the rougher months of the year it had constantly to be provisioned for a siege of stormy weather, since for weeks at a time it was dangerous if not impossible to approach the island. The one harbour faced the main-

land with two prodigious walls of rock, and a narrow belt of smooth sand between, which ran upward towards hardy grasses, and was directly overlooked by the mansion. Those vast walls of rock and the narrow space between them were known to the local folk as the Gate of the Sea. So old a house as that of the Tregarthens could scarcely fail to have been shot at by the local bards and soothsayers—shoot bolts enough and some of them are sure to stick—and one of many prophecies and mottoes clung. It set forth, that whatsoever good or evil the Tregarthens endured should come to them by the Gate of the Sea—a conclusion somewhat obvious, since, unless by balloon or earthquake there was no other way of approaching their dwelling-place. If the Cornish couplet be

faithfully translated, it prophesies as much for character as for fortune—

What evil or good ye have or be
Shall come to you all by the Gate of the Sea.

Now, in the days when a full cellar, a roughly generous larder, and a chance of hard knocks and loot could tempt adventurous souls to follow a freebooting gentleman, Tregarthen's house might have been a pleasurable place to live in for those whose fancy lay that way. But for an almost companionless youngster, who had just learned one of the world's bitterest lessons, it was as unwholesome a residence as might anywhere have been found. Tregarthen needed home influences and cheerful companionship, but he had long been an orphan, and he had neither brother nor

sister. He was not absolutely wealthy, but he had more money than he wanted, and there were few things which would have been of more use to him than the spur of poverty.

It is easy in the hot days of youth for the mind to persuade itself to anything. Tregarthen persuaded himself that he had done with the world for good and all, that it should occupy him no more, and that he would live for his studies and no other earthly thing. His studies began to lead him in a direction which it was somewhat odd that a young gentleman of the nineteenth century should take. Some ancestor of his had collected all the works of that crowd of impostors, quacks, self-deceivers, enthusiasts, and martyrs to science who have written on the transmuta-

tion of metals, the divining rod, the elixir vitæ, the powers and properties of the stars, and so forth—all the works, that is to say, that he could in one short lifetime lay hands on. Tregarthen began to grope amongst the dark sayings of these gentry, at first with an amused interest and then with a singular growth of doubt. There might be something in the doctrine of transmutation after all.

When a man begins even to doubt on a question like that he is pretty far gone on a road which has led oftener than not to mere madness. Tregarthen saw the danger, but the study drew him and absorbed him more and more, until he began to find in it a compensation for all things. If a man *could* find the philosopher's stone! Let any man in his sane and sober senses surrender him-

self to the fancy for a moment, and where are the glories of the cave into which the magician dropped Aladdin, or the valley into which the roc carried Sinbad? They are no more than a billiard ball in comparison with Saturn. But be touched with doubt as to the bare possibility of its actual discovery, and the poor mind is dazzled, staggered, overawed, by the magnificence of its own fancies. Tregarthen began to dream these dreams.

He lived almost alone through the wild winter and the blustering spring. Early summer found him more and more ready to surrender himself to the intoxication of this singular madness. Perhaps it needs that a certain strain of greatness shall lie in a man's nature before he can go mad in that particular

way. The compact small creature whose faculties are all of a size is as safe as the compact great creature whose powers are equally well balanced.

Happily for most of us, the world is too much with us to allow us to develop to complete fulness of eccentricity. Transplanted to Jupiter the human race might find elbow room enough to grow into a huge asylum of crazy humourists, but our crowded civilisation acts upon us as close shelter acts on the trees in a plantation—the outer lines grow a little twisted, perhaps, but in the middle of the wood the stems are straight and uniform. Tregarthen in his island castle off the Cornish coast was still a little sheltered. By-and-by a shelter he had not hoped for began to grow about him.

The blustering spring had passed, and here was a lovely day in mid-June, with a sky of sapphire, a sea of sapphire and pearl, and a breeze of warm spice and balm. Tregarthen wandered, smoking and lost in idle meditation, to the cliffs on the right side of the sea-gate, and there cast himself full length on the warm and scented herbage. The splendour of the day was nothing to him just then, and though his bodily eyes took cognisance of one of the finest reaches of rock-bound coast England can show, he had no conscious pleasure in it. He pulled his soft hat over his eyes and surrendered himself to his pipe and his dreams. Everything was wonderfully still. He could hear the splash of the waves on the rocks below, though he gave no heed to it, and the in-

tricate murmurs of many insects mingled drowsily with the voice of the sea, as though they were of equal volume with it. Tregarthen's dreams, under these conditions, grew more and more dreamy; his fancies, like the sounds about him, became dim and diffused. Anything was welcome to the domination of his mind at such a moment, and a certain idle rhythm in the fall and rise of the waters down below did well enough to think about.

He was certainly not quite wide awake, and he was just as certainly not quite asleep when a vision dawned upon him. Two or three vilely-painted trees fluttered on a ragged canvas and libelled the forest of Arden. A dowdy female, and a melancholy male in a fool's coxcomb walked before the

painted cloth and libelled Celia and Touchstone. Then suddenly came into sight a radiant creature, and a voice spoke in tones which blended resignation and fatigue with something almost jesting—‘ Oh, Jupiter, how weary are my spirits ! ’ This voice was so near and clear that it awoke him and brought him bolt upright, sitting in the bracken. There was a sound of laughter and voices on the little strip of sand below, and, moving to the edge of the cliff, he looked over.

In fine summer weather it was a common thing for people to row across from the mainland and picnic on the island. Tregarthen’s forbears had permitted this, and Tregarthen himself had never felt an objection to it until now. It may be allowed that, at

the moment at which he found himself interrupted, his studies were not of the most exigent sort, yet his first thought was that the presence of these intruders and their like would be inimical to study. Then he regretted the loss of his dream, and blamed the intruders for breaking it, though the dream itself had awakened him.

His half slumber had lasted for so short a space of time that the pipe he held between his finger and thumb still sent up a streak of faint blue smoke. He stuck it between his lips again, and had turned to ramble homewards when the voice of his dream spoke in his waking ear, and stayed his footsteps.

‘That is Miss Churchill, the actress,’ he said to himself. ‘There is not another voice

like that in the world, I should fancy. I should know it amongst a thousand.'

Since the night on which he had earned his own ruin by rebuking Colonel Pollard for his story of the actress he had scarcely thought about her, but he felt a curious pleasure and interest now in the belief that she was near. In spite of his shortsightedness he had a very definite idea of what she was like. It seemed to him that he could summon her face before his mind's eye quite clearly, and, as he saw it, it was worthy of her figure and her voice. He confessed to himself that he would like to see her nearer at hand, and to know how far her mind corresponded to his own impressions of her genius as an actress. It could not be difficult to devise a means of seeing her or even of

speaking to her, seeing that she was actually a trespasser upon his ground. He thought, however, of a score of devices, none of which commended themselves to him, and as he thought he strolled towards the spot where the gradual rise of the sands and the more precipitous fall of the cliff brought the two upon a level. This spot was about midway between high-water line and the gates of the old mansion, and he reached it almost at the same moment with the visitors to the island. He heard the sweet voice talking again, and was more than ever persuaded that it belonged to Miss Churchill.

He polished his eyeglass in readiness to observe, and before he himself was seen he had secured a good look at every person in the little party. The lady with the sweet

voice was tall and graceful, but her face was not the face of his memory. Compared with that memory the face was plain, though few people would have expressed so unfavourable a judgment had they but looked at it by itself. The eyes, of no particular colour, were large, intelligent, and sympathetic; the lips were beautiful alike in form and expression; the brow was broad and white. The skin was pallid, and the hair, like the eyes, was of no particular colour. Perhaps the want of definite colouring was the chief fault of the face; but, be that as it may, it was thrown back, for whatever beauty or charm it claimed, upon expression. There was no chance of finding out all these things at a look, and Tregarthen was only conscious of a disappointment. The face

was not the one he remembered, nor anything like it ; and there might be two voices alike in the world after all.

He was a little embarrassed for a moment, even though he stood on his own ground and the new comers were strangers and intruders, for the lady looked at him when once she had felt his glance, and regarded him with a curiously candid and unaffected gaze, much more like that of a child than a woman. Before Tregarthen's sense of embarrassment became overwhelming, one of the lady's male companions stepped forward, with a somewhat overwrought flourish of politeness.

‘I believe I have the pleasure of addressing Mr. Tregarthen?’ Tregarthen bowed, and the stranger flourished his hat to his

head and flourished his handkerchief out of his pocket. 'I have not the honour of being personally known to you, sir, but my father was your respected father's solicitor—Mr. Penruth of Gorbay. I have dared to trespass in order to oblige these ladies and gentlemen with a sight of Tregarthen Castle.'

'I remember your father, sir,' said Tregarthen, a little confusedly, 'and you are quite welcome here.' It was strange, he thought, that in so little a while his absence from the common haunts of men should have cost him so much in *savoir-faire*. 'If your friends would care to see the interior of the house I shall be happy to admit them. Pray introduce me.'

Mr. Penruth was obviously delighted,

and was honoured by Tregarthen's affability. The last representative of the great local family was not rich, as the times go, but he had a background: a fact to which people who have no background are apt to attach a superstitious value. The solicitor flourished through the introductions, and Tregarthen caught no name until he faced the lady he had supposed to be Miss Churchill.

‘Miss Farmer,’ said Mr. Penruth; ‘Gorbay’s chief ornament.—Mr. Tregarthen.’

The girl flushed at this for a moment with a look of anger, but she bowed to Tregarthen as if he had been a squire of low degree and she a princess. It crossed him that she was not so plain as he had fancied. Mr. Penruth was persuaded that he had said

the right thing in the right way, and got through the remaining introductions with increased ease and glibness.

‘If we *may* have your permission to visit the castle,’ he began, when the ceremony was over Tregarthen cut him short with a dry ‘Certainly;’ and fell into talk with the lady of the voice. She seemed chary at first of letting the voice be heard, but by-and-by, at the sight of the picturesque old ruins and remnants of Tregarthen’s house, she warmed. The dim family portraits, the arms and armour, the black oak of walls, ceilings, and furniture delighted her, and she took no less interest in the grey walls from which trees sprang, the broken arches and window spaces opening on blue air, in what had once been the family stronghold. In a case like this it

is perhaps less important to note what a charming woman says than how she says it. Her commonplaces were commonplace enough, but they dropped on Tregarthen's ears so pleasantly that he would rather have listened to them than to much learning and wisdom.

She was charmingly dressed in a fashion which is now deservedly stigmatised as ugly. Tregarthen thought he had rarely seen anything so dignified, yet so gentle, as her carriage, and the singular, soft fascination of her voice grew upon him more and more.

When the rounds were finished the host proffered to his guests some slight refreshment, which the Gorbay solicitor, in behalf of self and friends, declined with many flourishes of humility and gratitude. Tre-

garthen saw nothing for it but to permit them to retire, though he would willingly have detained one of them a little longer. When they had gone, the young gentleman was guilty of what he felt to be a meanness. He stationed himself at his bedroom window, and thence, by means of a single-barrelled opera-glass which had belonged to his mother, he kept the lady of the voice in sight until she and her companions had entered the boat in which they had arrived, and the little vessel, being pushed off, disappeared behind the cliffs.

Tregarthen did not resume his studies that evening with anything like his customary gusto. A commoner malady than the old one had clapped him on the shoulder. His books lay spread about his library table, and

now and then he fingered the leaves of one or another of them, and even read a passage in which he found no meaning. That was not at all an uncommon thing at the best of times, but it generally arose from the fact that there was no meaning to be found, whereas now the main reason was that he brought no understanding to his reading.

CHAPTER IV.

THE plain English of the matter was that Tregarthen had fallen in love, though only in an experimental fashion. He was not yet beyond all chance—nobody ever was, as the result of a single interview—but a longing was upon him to see more of the woman who had so much interested him, and he walked into bondage with his eyes open. Even thus early he guessed what was the matter with him.

‘I must know more of her,’ he said.
‘A man must be a poor creature who allows

himself to go down before a pair of expressive eyes before he can guess whether there is a soul behind them or not.'

The young man set forth deliberately in quest of Miss Farmer's soul with intent to examine and appraise it. He found the slightest difficulty in obtaining a second introduction to the lady, and it was managed to look accidental and unsought. Gorbay was not a big place, nor had it many people of importance within its boundaries. The importance of people is not determined, to themselves, by the estimation in which they are held by others, and the inhabitants of Gorbay were as much interested in their own affairs as if they had all been dukes and duchesses—a provision of nature without whose operation things would be extremely

dull for most of us. When Tregarthen, whose seclusion had been a good deal talked about, began to make visits to the mainland and to cultivate the small gentry of the town, the unfavourable opinions which had been formed of him melted and disappeared. The Tregarthens had always been so far above the professional people and the small retired capitalists of Gorbay that the condescension displayed by this latest scion of the house was the more remarkable and the more valued.

There were people who could tell him all about Miss Farmer's simple and uneventful history. He learned that she was the daughter of the Vicar, and, except for the time she had spent at school and a term of eighteen months passed in London, was bred

in Gorbay. She passed there as being learned beyond the rights of women, but that was the only fault that anybody found with her. The Vicar nearly three years ago, about the time when Tregarthen had been awaiting his commission, had departed this life, leaving two daughters very ill provided for. Miss Farmer had thereupon gone to London and had there made a living for herself and her young sister, it was believed by writing for the magazines. Certain poems and stories bearing her name had reached even to Gorbay, and there was a general belief there that in the outer world she was famous. But an uncle in the north—the Farmers were northern people, it appeared—had died two years later than his brother the Vicar, and had left to Miss

Farmer funded moneys to the value of some five hundred a year. On this she kept house in modest and elegant comfort, and the return of the elder girl had been welcomed by all who knew her. The younger had been put to school during her sister's absence and was now finishing her education at home.

There is not much out of the common in this narrative to anybody who does not happen to be in love with Miss Farmer, or strongly inclined that way. But to Tregarthen the story seemed one of heroism and sorrow, and he thought he could see already some of those inward qualities of which he desired to assure himself. The daughter of a clergyman is conventionally a gentlewoman, and he was already persuaded that Miss Farmer possessed all desirable womanly

qualities when he met her for the second time. They had talked commonplaces at their first meeting and had been aware of the fact. They talked commonplaces now and did not know it, because they spoke of books and art, and nobody believes that he or she can talk commonplaces upon those inspiring themes. Miss Farmer's soul declared itself more and more freely to Tregarthen's attentive observation, and he was more and more convinced that it was of the right quality and pattern.

The young man had taken apartments for the rest of the summer season at 'The George,' and Gorbay knew by this time in what pursuit he was engaged. Mr. Tregarthen rambled much in the pleasant fields beyond the town, and Miss Farmer, who

had a taste for botany and some little knowledge of the science, was indefatigable in exercise. The two young people met on most days, and the little sister was old enough to play propriety, and—which was perhaps of more importance—was old enough to know when she was not wanted. Any wandering butterfly was reason enough for a race which at least took this sensible child round a corner of the lane in which her elders strolled.

The searcher after the philosopher's stone had found it, but not where he expected. Everything had grown golden for him. The simile is poverty-stricken, but there is no simile which will express the spiritual wealth of a heart which for the first time has given away all its substance.

It was time for lover's confidences, and they were exchanged. The sensible child had gone full tilt round a leafy corner, and the young man and his sweetheart lingered at a stile. The child carolled with a wonderfully sweet shrill voice fifty yards away and the elders talked.

'You remember,' said Tregarthen, 'the day on which we first met?'

'Yes,' she answered with a delicious shyness. His ardent eyes—she thought she had never seen anything so tender, ardent as they were—and her bashful glance met for a moment, and she blushed a little.

'I was lying on the grass,' he said, 'on the top of the cliff, above the landing-place, when I heard your voice, and it awoke me.'

‘Was I so boisterous?’ she asked, smiling, with her eyes upon the ground.

‘No,’ he answered, with a little tender laugh, which of itself was a lover’s flattery, ‘but it awoke me. From a curious dream,’ he added, with an air of odd reluctance.

‘Indeed?’ she said questioningly.

Tregarthen began to wish in a vague way that he had not mentioned this. His goddess might not care to know that one of her rarest charms had reminded him of an actress. But, having begun, he felt bound to go on, so he spoke with a feigned lightness, and looked anywhere rather than at his sweetheart’s face.

‘I suppose you don’t know,’ he began, ‘what a lovely voice you have?’ She made no reply to this, but still looked demurely

on the ground at her feet. ‘When I first heard it I was dreaming, and I distinctly heard the words, “Oh, Jupiter, how weary are my spirits!”’

‘That was not strange,’ she answered, looking up at him, ‘I spoke them.’

‘Did you?’ he asked, with some confusion. All this seemed to have been said and done aforetime, and to have led to some unhappiness which now again threatened from the near future. Everybody has experienced that curious sensation.

‘What was your dream?’

‘Oh, my dream?’ he answered. ‘It was nothing. I dreamed I was at the play, and I saw Rosalind upon the stage.’

She looked up at him swiftly, with a hint of fear and half a hint of resolution in

her face. He struck out with a transparent pretence of being perfectly at his ease, and cut down a nettle with his walking-cane.

‘Your voice reminded me,’ he said, after a little pause, ‘of the most beautiful voice I had ever heard till then. I even thought I recognised it, and I walked down to meet you and found that I had made a blunder.’

‘In meeting me?’ she asked.

He laughed again, and their eyes met. In hers there was a tender triumph and gaiety which answered her own question fairly well, even without the aid of his, which beamed with admiration.

‘No,’ he answered, ‘but in dreaming that that lovely voice had ever sounded from the stage.’ He went on more at ease. ‘And yet the fancy haunted me all day.’

She was looking on the ground once more, and with the point of her parasol was turning a little pebble over and over. She stooped so that her face was hidden from him by the wide-brimmed summer hat she wore. If this were coquetry, the fashion of the day favoured it, for at the drooping edge of the width of plaited straw was a fringe of fine black lace some two or three inches deep, and he would have had to fall upon his knees to see her face. Could he have seen it he could not have failed to notice how flushed she was, and what a look of fear and shame was in her eyes.

‘Who was the lady,’ she asked, ‘whose voice so resembled mine?’

‘A Miss Churchill,’ said Tregarthen.
‘A delightful actress. The most charming

actress I ever saw.' It seemed necessary to make as much as might reasonably be made of Miss Churchill's perfections to excuse any comparison, however trivial, between her and the woman of his heart, who not only was not an actress and was a gentlewoman, but was also and of course beyond comparison with anybody. 'I saw her play Rosalind,' he hurried on, 'and since the first words I heard you speak were the first words I heard her speak the resemblance of the voices was accidentally heightened.'

'Did you wish very much to see Miss Churchill?' asked the young lady. 'Were you very much interested in her?'

'Not at all,' cried Tregarthen eagerly. 'I had forgotten her—until I heard the voice.'

‘ Were you disappointed when you found that it was only—me ? ’

‘ Only you ! ’ said the lover, and would not condescend to add to that simple but sufficient disclaimer, except by possessing himself first of her hand and then of her waist. For a while she bent her head and refused to allow him to steal the merest glance at her face, but by-and-by she turned upon him gently and gazed full in his eyes for a moment, whilst her figure yielded itself more freely to his embrace, and no longer repulsed him by its rigidity.

‘ If *I* had turned out to be Miss Churchill,’ she asked him, ‘ should you—— ? ’ She paused, but the very silence was eloquent.

‘ Have loved you ? ’ said Tregarthen.
‘ No. I could not have fallen in love with

an actress.' It seemed to him that there might be a touch of jealousy in the appeal, and he was in the mood to be tender to all love's fancies, however shadowy and unreal they might be.

'Why not?' she asked. 'There are many good women who are actresses, surely.'

'No doubt,' he answered lightly. 'Many. But you rub the bloom from the peach if you handle it ever so gently. An actress gains something more than most women hope for or care for, but she must be content to lose something—a delicacy, a fineness, which is not easy to describe, but means much to a man with any refinement of mind.'

He was far from being actually dishonest

in saying this, and yet he was not precisely honest. Left to himself and his own judgment he would not have thought these thoughts at all, but the fancy that his betrothed had that visionary jealousy of the actress moved him to make the jealousy impossible.

‘But if you had met her and had fallen in love with her,’ said the girl, ‘and had then found that she was an actress—that would have made no difference to you?’

‘Yes,’ he said gravely, and as if considering the matter, ‘a serious difference.’

‘I fancied men thought differently,’ she said, with some little heat of scorn. ‘I fancied that they did not altogether care so much for those of us who live along in the one little groove of household cares and

small accomplishments and silly joys and sorrows.'

'I shall ask you to achieve no out-of-doors greatness,' Tregarthen answered fondly ; ' though you are more fit to shine in the world's eye than any other woman now alive.' The young man was not a fine judge of verse, and it was natural to think the Laureate's outpourings inferior to those of the woman he himself was in love with. ' Be as great as you will, but shine at home, my dear, and let me worship you.'

That was a pretty programme, and the girl found no fault with it as it applied to her own prospects. But she had rather—how much rather!—that her future husband should have thought better of Miss Churchill's profession. It was clear that he suspected

nothing, imagined nothing, but it was a pain to have a secret, though it were as harmless as her own. For Miss Churchill, though an actress, was as pure as a daisy, and nobody knew better than Miss Farmer how little evil the stage had taught her, though there are millions who know infinitely better how much evil it has the power to teach.

One unavoidable result came out of this conversation. Miss Farmer buried Miss Churchill, and resolved that the actress should know no resurrection. But then (as people unfairly or secretly entombed with fears and suspicions hanging about them have a prescriptive right to do) Miss Churchill assumed ghost-like airs and revisited the upper world and peopled the sexton's life with unreal terrors. Tregarthen

had taught the girl to love him. She had been an apt and willing pupil, and had learned to love him well. She was of a large and generous nature, affectionate rather than passionate, but inclined to cling to the object of her affection with life-long tenacity. There are few women who would not have kept her innocent secret rather than run the risk of losing a lover. And Tregarthen was the one man in the world to her, as a woman's first love always is—the one possible idol. The mere thought of losing him was cruel beyond expression; the mere fancy that she might risk his loss was scarcely bearable. She so honoured and revered and loved him, that she was forced to deceive him. That is not good morality, but it is admirable feminine logic.

The courtship went on, and Gorbay and the county beyond the limits of Gorbay discussed it, and on the whole were content with it. Tregarthen might have looked higher in spite of those regimental escapades of his, for the last scion of one of the oldest houses in that part of England, where houses are so amazingly old, might think himself almost any man's equal. He was not a millionaire, but he had enough, and he was unusually personable. Everybody was persuaded that the match, from Miss Farmer's point of view, was all that could be desired.

Within nine months of their first speech with each other the young pair became man and wife, and set up housekeeping in Gorbay. They had an exquisitely ap-

pointed house, standing in the midst of some eight acres of well-timbered ground and surrounded by trim gardens. Whilst they lived here the old mansion on Tregarthen island was to be restored to something of its former grandeur, and Mrs. Tregarthen insisted upon having a hand in this. She insisted on having so influential a hand in it that she placed the whole of her own modest fortune in her husband's hands and bade him make that suffice.

‘You bring me the grandeur of an old name,’ she said, ‘and I claim to have my share in its honours. If you refuse me this I only half divide them.’

Tregarthen, after many affectionate disputes, took the money.

‘Whatever is mine is yours,’ he said, ‘and whatever is yours is mine. It is like the right hand giving to the left.’

‘Precisely,’ said his wife, well pleased, and the architect was busy at once. By the beginning of July the builders were at work, and the young couple had great joy in crossing from Gorbay Head to Tregarthen and watching the slow growth of the old place to a new being. Tregarthen’s funds were snugly invested, and there were ample means to keep the reglorified house in reasonable state. Meantime, in other matters they were content to retrench, and Mrs. Tregarthen wrote industriously at a romance on a large scale, determined not to cost her husband a penny in dresses, and to win an anonymous fame, of which he,

who alone should have the secret, should be as proud as she was of him.

Visitors came thickly to Tregarthen that summer; some, who had archæological tastes, from afar, bent on seeing the house once before it assumed its new form. It was no matter for surprise, therefore, when a couple of sturdy boatmen pulled over a party of ladies and gentlemen with a fat and spectacled savant at their head, and the fat and spectacled one began to wander about amongst the stones and the mortar, delivering a little lecture to his following as he went. The married pair were in the habitable part of the house, and at the moment when the boat grounded at the Sea-Gate Mrs. Tregarthen was receiving a confession from her husband. He was

standing at the window from which he had watched her on her first visit to the island and was telling her, with no shamefacedness, how he had kept her in sight after he parted from her. It was not from any standpoint but her own a deed to be rewarded, but she kissed him for it with all her heart, and they went gaily out together for a ramble on the cliffs. Before they started, Tregarthen took a look at the approaching party through the single-barrelled opera-glass.

‘We can go out with a clear conscience, my dear,’ he said; ‘there is no one we know amongst them.’

They had not left the house long when an architect’s clerk came racing after them, and asked Tregarthen’s presence.

The architect himself was on the ground, and desired his opinion on some question or another which could only be decided on the spot.

‘Walk on,’ said Tregarthen to his wife, ‘I shall overtake you.’

She answered with a smile and a nod, and rambled slowly over the verdurous slopes, and enjoyed the fresh sea-breeze. In a while she looked back, and, seeing no sign of her husband, she sate in the shelter of an overhanging boulder, and sinking down in the soft mosses, surrendered herself to happy broodings upon her husband, her home, his love and her own, and the cloudless sky that overhung their sweet domestic life. She was so deep sunk in reverie, and the mosses hereabout were so

soft and thick that a wandering footstep near at hand failed to reach her ear, and she was a little startled to find a picturesque young man baring his head before her with an almost theatrical air of homage.

‘Miss Churchill!’ said the picturesque young man in accents of delighted surprise. ‘I was assured the world was not robbed of you, but I am amazed to find you here. Amazed and charmed.’

She did not recognise him, and arose with some indignation at the familiarity of his tone. She was startled by his sudden coming, too, and at the first flash she saw danger in the presence of any man who had known Miss Churchill.

‘I am Mrs. Tregarthen, sir,’ she said haughtily and coldly.

‘I beg pardon,’ said the picturesque young man, still standing, hat in hand, before her. ‘I cannot be mistaken. I had the honour to meet you at the “Mirror.” My name is Marsh—Ronald Marsh. I owed the pleasure to Mr. Lorrimer.’

‘I have no recollection of the circumstance,’ she said, even more coldly than before.

Mr. Ronald Marsh smiled with no touch of embarrassment. It was a little odd that there were people in the world who did not leap at the chance of talking to him, but the fact was indisputable, and he was used to it.

‘I beg your pardon again,’ he said, with a graceful wave of his sombrero. ‘At least I may have the gratification of being assured

that I am not in error in assuming you to be Miss Churchill.'

Training tells in all things, and there was a little ring of the stage in her lovely voice as she answered him—

'I was Miss Churchill, sir ; but I have no desire to resume acquaintance with any person who knew me by that name.'

Mr. Ronald Marsh flushed to the roots of his hair, and donned his sombrero, with a final bow. She moved past him, with flashing eyes and head erect, and sweeping thus round the edge of the great boulder, met Tregarthen face to face.

CHAPTER V.

HUSBAND and wife looked at each other for a moment, and then the wife's eyes drooped guiltily. It is characteristic of people at large to be wiser about other people's affairs than they are about their own—being freed, in the one case, of egotism's glasses—and almost anybody can see that although there was sufficient occasion for a domestic scene, there was no reason to regard the position of things as being essentially tragic. You must endure a good deal before you tear yourself from your dearer half in your sober senses.

But the one thing that stared each of these people in the face was a lifelong and inevitable separation.

‘I have deceived him,’ said the wife, with such a cold anguish of repentance as could only come of detection. ‘He will never believe me nor love me again.’

‘Is this thing true?’ asked Tregarthen coldly. Her aspect was enough to convict her, and he turned away. Icy as he was to look at, he was afraid of himself, and felt that he was not to be trusted with many words. He would go away therefore, and would think how best to bear himself in this terrible and unsuspected condition of affairs. He had not gone far when it came into his mind that the condition of affairs—however unexpected it might be—was scarcely so

terrible as it had seemed at first. He began to think how strongly he had spoken, when—as it now appeared—his wife had wished to take him into her confidence. After all there was no sin or shame in having been an actress. Colonel Pollard had said things of that very Miss Churchill with whom his wife was now identified which were hideous if true or possible, but he knew them to be false. The more he thought about it the more he was persuaded anew of what he had always known as only a lover knows anything—the purity of his wife's mind and history. She had deceived him in one matter, but then he had forced deception upon her. And after all they were man and wife, and he loved her as he had never loved anybody in his life before or could hope to

love a second time. The revelation he had surprised was a thing to be made the best of, to be understood and accepted once for all, and then buried and forgotten.

This resolution was not arrived at in a hurry, and it took him an hour or two to put himself into the new mental attitude necessary to its acceptance. When he had succeeded he went home and awaited Mrs. Tregarthen's return, intending a serious conference and a perfect understanding. When he took her back to confidence there should be no lingering doubt in his mind. She should know all that had been charged against Miss Churchill, and she should deny it, and there should be an end of the episode. He was not shaken in his belief in his wife's honour, and if she had not given

him all her confidence it was because she had thought it would imperil his love for her.

‘Has Mrs. Tregarthen returned?’ he asked the servant who admitted him.

‘No, sir.’

‘Let me know when she does so.’

‘Yes, sir.’

He sat a long time silent and alone, and there came into his mind the not too delicate commendations bestowed upon Miss Churchill by the Captain and his echo the Lieutenant. He went with them into the theatre, and the magic of the beautiful voice touched him again. He went anew through his pleasant fancies of her, and his defence of her against Pollard, and his first meeting with her, and his second, and his third—all

the story of his courtship floated through his mind—and he would have sworn to her immaculate purity, or would have died to prove his faith in it.

It grew dusk, and the early summer moon was already shining with a ghostly silver gleam in the darkening violet of the sky. Fears began to rise in his mind, and he pictured the delicate sensitive thing in shame and soreness of heart over this pardonable secrecy of hers, hiding herself and fearing to approach him. He remembered how he had asked his question, ‘Is this thing true?’ and how without a word from her in answer he had turned away and left her. His fears began to rise higher and to take one or two horrible forms which presented themselves persistently.

It neither increased nor dissipated these fears when he had run down to the Gate of the Sea and had learnt that she had left the island two or three hours ago, and had returned to the mainland, sending the boatmen back to await his pleasure. He took his seat in the boat at once and bade the men give way. Before they were half across the narrow waters he could see his own house on Gorbay Head, and could make out that the one light which twinkled in it came from his wife's room. His heart seemed almost to fly from his body as he sent before him his message of forgiveness and affection; and when the nose of the boat ground against the shingle he left the little vessel with a leap and ran to the house in haste. A man servant met him with an uninterested

face, and handed him a letter on a salver.

‘Mrs. Tregarthen ordered this to be given to you, sir, on your return,’ he said.

‘Where is Mrs. Tregarthen?’ asked the husband.

‘She went up to town, sir, by the seven express,’ returned the servant.

‘Alone?’ inquired his master, turning away to hide his face and trifling with the letter in his hands.

‘Took Miss Farmer with her, sir—and the maid.’

The servant followed him into the room he entered, and there turned up the lamps and laid hands upon a trifle or two upon the sideboard and the table.

‘ You may go,’ said his master quietly.

The man retired, and Tregarthen sat down by the centre table, drew the lamp closer, and opened the envelope. For a time the slender letters danced before his eyes, and he could not make out a word, but in a while he mastered himself and began to read. What he read was incoherent and agonised. It was written in haste, with blots and erasures, and there were blisters upon the paper where the writer’s tears had fallen. She had known her own unworthiness in keeping her secret all along, she wrote, but she had never dared to tell him what her past life had been. And now he had discovered her duplicity and wickedness, and she could not bear to face him. She had gone away, and she begged him to

forget her. But she loved him, and she prayed heaven to bless him.

There was much more to this effect, and, whilst he read, the shadow of a horrible doubt fell closer and darker round his heart. What was there in the mere discovery, taken by itself, to excite such anguish as the letter displayed? What lay behind the discovery? Was it likely that a wife would run away from her husband and her home on a provocation so trivial as the discovery of itself afforded? Then all his heart rose up to defend her, and he was torn between doubt and trust, and love and fear, and the little mild passions that had dwelt within him dilated to giant size on a sudden, and took his soul for a battle-ground, and shook it with their conflict.

There was no sleep for him that night, and all next day he wandered vaguely, trying to make up his mind to some course of action. His wife had given him no address, but it did not seem to him at first that it would be difficult to discover her in London. But was her flight in itself a confession of worse than he knew, or could he bear to hear that confession if it had to be made, or to hear her denial of it and to have to doubt her still?

If people always did the plain common-sense thing, always spoke the plain truth, and always looked circumstances in the face, the world would be improved out of knowledge. Mrs. Tregarthen had taken perhaps the most foolish of possible steps, had disguised the truth, and now ran away from

the circumstances she had herself created; and yet you shall not despise her if I can help it. It was an innocent courage which had led her—more for her sister's sake than her own—to the stage. It was a pardonable fear which had kept her silent as to that episode in her life. It is one of the ways of women to look their best in the eyes of the people they love, and this leads them to reservations and pretences. A weakness characteristic of a whole half of humanity must not be judged too severely. When she ran away she did so because a tender conscience, hitherto void of great offence, exaggerated her little folly into a crime. She made up her innocent mind that she was one of the wickedest women in the world. She had married her husband under false pretences !

When Tregarthen turned his back upon her she read a final renunciation in the act, and was persuaded that she had lost him for ever. She had no blame for him then or afterwards, and she recognised the justice of the imagined sentence even at the moment when its weight first crushed her. The perfect trust which love should have in love is a flower of slow growth indeed. Often enough life is over before it has reached to its full bloom, though there is this compensation for its laggard coming, that when once it blossoms it can know no decay.

Mrs. Tregarthen went to London, and naturally enough sought the one place there which she had known before—a respectable, if somewhat dingy, boarding-house off the Strand. The stout landlady had not

forgotten her, and received her kindly. There was a faint flavour of home in the stuffy bedroom, and at least it was better to be there than to find a nest altogether strange. But the foolish fugitive had run away without any prevision, and had made no arrangements for those bodily needs which continue their claim in spite of sins or repentances. She had twenty pounds in money, and her maid, being bidden to pack for London, had naturally foreseen festivity, and had put up all the hapless lady's jewelry. There was no fear of immediate starvation therefore, but none the less that terror loomed from the future. She was sure that she was for ever parted from her husband, and when the first agony of that certainty had settled down into a dull pain, she had to think of

ways and means for her sister's sake, and in a little while (for a reason she had not hitherto dreamed of) for her own.

The maid, who was for the first time in London, was but poorly impressed with town life, as may be fancied. The stuffy lodging-house was not the sort of place in which Mrs. Tregarthen's position gave her a right to bestow herself, and the maid knew it. Once or twice she had surprised her mistress in tears, and she had found out very early in the history of the expedition that there were no ideas of festivity in Mrs. Tregarthen's mind. She began to put two and two together, and after a week she spoke.

‘I beg your pardon, ma'am, but it is my wish to leave.’

‘How is that, Mary?’ inquired the mistress with a sinking heart. The heart had sunk low enough already in all conscience, but it fell lower yet when the maid spoke of leaving. Tregarthen had himself engaged this woman to serve his wife, and the exile was ready to cling to anything that bound her, however slightly, to her home and him.

‘Well, ma’am,’ returned the maid, ‘since you ask me, I don’t understand things, and I’d rather go.’

There would be one mouth the less to fill, but that was little. The maid received her wages and went away, though she kept an eye on Mrs. Tregarthen, having fancies of her own concerning the reasons for this curious escapade. The expected gallant

never appeared, however, and when Mrs. Tregarthen went abroad, she took the child with her, and, after a purposeless walk, returned without having spoken to a single creature. In these circumstances the maid's interest in her late mistress declined, and she found another place and went her way, content to leave a mystery unsolved.

The poor lady set aside all her gayer dresses and attired herself in sombre raiment as typifying mourning, and when one day Mr. Lorrimer caught sight of her in the street by accident, he took her for a widow.

‘Ran away from the stage to be married, did she, poor thing!’ said Lorrimer to himself, not unkindly. ‘Well, if love’s young dream is over, she’ll be back again. I’m a

business man, and I can't afford to miss a chance like Miss Churchill a second time.'

So Mr. Lorrimer, without particularly violating his conscience, lit a new cigar, cocked his hat a little, and dogged Mrs. Tregarthen home.

'Boarding-house. Mrs. Barnley. Respectable poverty. Married a widower. Widow left hard up. Encumbered with little girl. Poor thing! poor thing! Get her now on easy terms.'

Mr. Lorrimer cocked his hat anew, bit off the end of a second cigar, struck a brown-paper fusee on his trousers, lit the cigar with an air of victory, and walked homewards. Shortly before nine o'clock, being by that time in the full glory of

evening-dress, he strolled past the house a dozen times or so, and had begun to examine the windows with some impatience, when a servant girl came up the area steps bearing half-a-dozen jugs of different sizes, and made her way towards the corner public house. Mr. Lorrimer intercepted her.

‘Good evening, my dear. Don’t be frightened.’ The girl had pranced into the middle of the roadway. ‘I only want to ask you a question—quite a harmless question. Half-a-crown, my dear.’ The coin rattled into one of the jugs. ‘There’s a lady staying at Mrs. Barnley’s—a young lady, dressed in mourning—goes about with a little girl. I want to call upon her—quite honourable and correct—I know of something to her advantage. I used to know

her maiden name—Miss Churchill. What is her name now ? ’

‘ Mrs. Tregarthen,’ said the girl. ‘ That’s her sister she’s got with her.’

‘ Mrs. Tregarthen,’ said Mr. Lorrimer. ‘ Thank you. I’ve got the name all right, have I ? Tre—gar—then ? ’

‘ That’s right, sir,’ responded the servant, polishing her nose with the bottom of a beer-jug. ‘ Tregarthen. Thank you, sir.’

‘ She’s at home now, I think ? ’ said Lorrimer.

The maid nodded, and he marched at once to the door of the house and knocked. Mrs. Tregarthen, sitting in her own room, heard the knock and felt her heart so leap at it that she was fain to rise and open her chamber door to listen. But that was a

common experience. Not a knock had come to the door of Mrs. Barnley's establishment, since the unhappy lady had entered it, without shaking her heart and fluttering her nerves in this way. She heard the door flung open, and then came the murmur of a male voice, indistinct and low. The maid's voice cackled shrill and clear in answer.

‘Mrs. Tregarthen, sir? Yes, sir. Walk in, sir. What name shall I say, sir?’

It had been in Mrs. Tregarthen's mind from the first, or almost from the first, that Arthur might love her so well that, in spite of her wickedness, he would seek her out and forgive her, and this hope had buoyed her up and weighed her down as such things will. Now she believed that he really had traced her, and her knees were so weakened

that she could scarce let go the door and creep back to her chair to be in readiness for the servant's coming. Lodging-house maids are not more observant or sympathetic than their neighbours as a rule, but even by the light of the one pale candle on the table Mrs. Tregarthen's face had so much trouble and terror in it that the girl, when she entered with Lorrimer's card, caught fright, and begged to know what was the matter.

‘Nothing,’ said the poor creature, with her eyes wide open, and her face as white as the lace about her throat. ‘Is that for me?’

She stretched out her hand for the card, and when she had read the name upon it she dropped it with a little moan of escape and disappointment, and one or two half-

hysterical tears ran down her cheeks. The servant bustled about the room and got her a glass of water after much unnecessary clatter. Lorrimer, waiting in the room below, had undefined notions of a cavalry skirmish floating through his mind. A moment later the servant, a petticoated avalanche, precipitated herself downstairs.

‘The lady can’t see you, sir. She’s took quite ill.’

‘Indeed?’ said Lorrimer, politely regretful. ‘Nothing serious, I trust.’

‘I ain’t so sure o’ that,’ returned the maid. ‘She’s like a ghost, and she can’t scarcely sit in her chair, sir.’

Lorrimer opened his eyes with unfeigned fear. He saw thousands of pounds in Mrs. Tregarthen, and, being a sanguine man, as

theatrical managers nearly always are, he had already arranged terms with the lady and had her enthusiastically trumpeted, and conducted her first performance with prodigious *éclat*. At the very moment when the cavalry skirmish began overhead he had been returning thanks for a piece of plate publicly presented to him (in recognition of his having made a fortune out of her) by the celebrated actress herself. The servant was really frightened, and looked so, and Lorrimer himself caught the infection.

‘Back as soon as possible,’ he murmured. ‘Gone for a doctor.’ And he shot from the room to save his thousands and the lady who was to make them.

He had noticed in the course of his peregrinations to and fro before the house that a

doctor lived next door, and he rang a startling peal at the medico's bell. The professional gentleman ran wildly into the boarding-house without his hat, and was ushered into the presence of a lady who received him with perfect self-possession and assured him that she had no need for his services. He was not to be got rid of, however, until he had felt her pulse and asked a question or two, and prescribed a tonic.

Before Lorrimer called next day the servant had told Mrs. Tregarthen of the interest he had displayed. The actress remembered the manager kindly, but she had no mind to renew their old acquaintance. She sent word down to him in answer to his inquiries that she was very much better and was very much obliged to him for his kind

inquiries. Some people would have accepted this as an intimation of polite dismissal, but Lorrimer was not one of them.

‘That’s right,’ he said cheerfully. ‘I’m glad to hear it. Just say I should like to see her—will you?—if it’s quite convenient to her. If it isn’t, ask when I can call again.’

‘Show Mr. Lorrimer into the visitors’ room,’ she said in answer to this message. It might be as well, she thought, to get Mr. Lorrimer over at once. If it were impossible to avoid recognition, it was still possible to let those who recognised her know that she desired privacy, and it was not likely that all who had known her would care to make pursuit of her. She touched her hair and the lace about her throat and wrists with delicate fingers as she stood before her

mirror, with no result perceptible to man, and having thus made herself fit to be seen, she descended the stairs and found Lorrimer awaiting her in the visitors' room—a carpeted box with an odour of dry rot.

A stage manager who could feel any sense of *gaucherie* in approaching an actress must have had the practice of his profession wasted upon him. With Lorrimer any sign of dignified reserve, which expressed itself without the pronounced standoffishness of a stage attitude and gesture, was lost. He had played many parts in his time, and to him the saying of the melancholy Jaques was literal—all the world was a stage. He took out the confidential-family-adviser stop, and addressed Mrs. Tregarthen in tones of genial sympathy.

‘ You left us, madam, in a somewhat sudden and unconventional way, but it was impossible for that or anything else to mitigate the pleasure and advantage of having known you. You have our profoundest sympathy in the calamity which has brought you back to us, but that is tempered by the hope that you may ultimately discover that the profession, of which you might have been the brightest ornament, has still an attraction for you, and that its triumphs offer a consolation not to be despised.’

This was spoken with the air natural to a master of the art of conversation. Lorri-mer was one of those people who take their theories so to heart that they make facts of them. His theory was that Mrs. Tregarthen was a widow, and in reduced circumstances.

He was quite certain that she left the stage to be married, and was equally sure that she would now return to it.

‘Do you mean,’ she asked, ‘that I shall go back to the stage, Mr. Lorrimer?’ He spread his hands abroad, and bowed, with a sweeping gesture of assent. ‘No, I shall never go back to the stage.’

The wrinkles of his smile remained for a second or two, but the light went out of his eyes at once, and the wrinkles faded slowly after it.

‘Not go back to the stage, madam?’ he cried. ‘Waste the superb talents God has given you on the mere desert air of private life? Cast away the splendid fortune which only needs an extended hand to grasp it? Impossible, madam—impossible.’

Mr. Lorrimer spoke with so evident an amazement that he impressed the listener in spite of herself. She had gone upon the stage simply and purely to make bread for herself and to find an education for her sister. Few of the triumphs or joys of stage life had come home to her, and even when they seemed all to lie waiting for her, she had been able to surrender their promise for the quiet routine of domesticity in Gorbay. They could scarcely have seemed very valuable to her since she had left them so easily. But Lorrimer put the case strongly, if grotesquely, and there could be no doubt of his sincerity.

She was but a simple-minded creature in spite of the talents of which Lorrimer spoke so highly, and she had a way of speak-

ing straight out the thing that was in her mind.

‘My husband——’ she began, but there she stopped with a sudden sense of heart-ache at the vast emptiness of the world. There is no pain the human heart can feel which is heavier to bear than that.

‘Your husband, madam?’ said Lorrimer, prompting her with a tone of respectful sympathy.

‘My husband,’ she began again, ‘had a profound dislike for the stage, and I must respect his opinion.’

‘That is natural and commendable, madam,’ returned Lorrimer with the family-adviser air more strongly marked than ever. ‘But when—in the course of a week or two—the healing hand of time has softened the

sense of loss, you may find yourself less inclined to elevate his scruples into absolute commandments.'

She shook her head with an expression so mournful and so resolute that Lorrimer felt it necessary to clear his throat before he spoke again.

'Well, madam, well,' he said rather hastily. 'If you *should* change your mind, you will know where I am. Fortune lies at your feet. You have only to stoop to pick up wealth and fame. And—as I say—if you *should* change your mind you will find nobody so devoted to your interests as myself. I have made the fortune of a nin-compoop before to-day, madam, and genius is the lever Archimedes wanted. With such genius as you possess I could move the

world. I ask nothing but my poor share of the glory, and half profits. But I will not further intrude upon you now. Good day, madam, good day.'

He was gone, but he left a seed behind him, and though it fell on ground unwilling to receive it, it took root and grew.

To have done a thing, with ninety-nine people in a hundred, is the best of all possible reasons for continuing to do it, especially if the thing is to be done passively. We like or dislike our everyday acquaintances on this principle, and it guides us in more matters than we often care to think of. The runaway wife had never written to her husband to apprise him of her whereabouts, and silence, which at first was hard, had

grown into such a habit that by this time nothing could have forced her to break it. She suffered, and she told herself that she deserved to suffer. She trained the thorns of remorse with a hand of constant care, and cultivated unhappiness as only a penitent and a woman could. And all the time she waited in a sort of hopeless hope for her husband to make some effort to recover her. Had he found her he could have taken home, not merely a wife, but a lover so full of love and penitence that she would have been his lifelong slave for no more than the privilege of seeing him. But he also waited with a heart that grew bitterer and heavier day by day, until at last the true masculine impatience of the slow suffering which women bear until they learn to

cherish it, bade him throw the burden away. He seemed to cast his heart away with it, but it had to go, and he went back to his mad-brained books again.

That so fine a triviality as that which separated these two hearts and lives should breed a day's coldness might surprise a lover. But there is no measurement for human folly, and the fools, as often as not, are lovable, pitiable, admirable. If only the people who are objectionable all round made fools of themselves, what a charming world we should live in !

CHAPTER VI.

MR. RONALD MARSH gave his poems to the world, and they made almost as much noise as he had hoped. But when one goes forth to make a noise in the world, the character of the clamour which arises is as important as the volume of it, and the public reception of Mr. Marsh's muse, though loud enough to satisfy anybody, aroused the bitterest scorn in the poet's heart. Such a charivari of chaff, such a Jovian roll and peal of laughter arose from the great reviewers, and was taken up by the little ones, as has rarely

rung in any poet's tingling ears since reviewing came into fashion. The *Times* set him down to roast at a whole column, the '*Tiser*' branded him with one red-hot paragraph, and from every point of the compass the critics big and little heaved the coals of fire of friendless criticism at him by the shovelful. But the poet, as Mr. Tennyson had already written, is at the moment of his birth 'dowered with the hate of hate—the scorn of scorn,' and Mr. Marsh was not easily to be discomfited. He bought sombreros of a wider brim than he had ever worn until then, he vowed in his inmost heart that the shears of the barber should invade his rolling locks no more, and he ordered his tailors to add an inch or two to the poetical cloak in which he commonly

went about London. The faithless few who had worn his livery and gone about in his likeness fled from their colours. They had their hair cut in the normal way, and began to attire themselves in the conventional garb of gentlemen. When friends talked about the Leader they made a weak pretence of having been in the secret all along, and tried to make it appear that they had been hugely tickled by the fustian which had thrilled their simple souls. The Leader had lost his following, as most leaders do when they lead to ridicule, but he faced the world alone and meditated fresh poems with an undaunted heart.

He abandoned none of his old haunts, but he found many of his old friends pitiless. There are few men who need sympathy

more than the man whose book is a failure. Within it, tangible and visible, lie the nerves of his soul, if he has one; he has put into it his acutest discernment, his sweetest fancies, his loftiest thoughts, his most cunning invention; he has glowed with hope and gone cold with fear about it; he has loved it tenderly and admiringly, as a good wife loves her husband, and with a growth of joy in its strength and beauty, as a father loves his child. Then comes the grim reviewer (born surely, with bowels of brass and heart of adamant), and slays this darling of the author's heart, scalps it, slits its dear little nose and tender ears, wreaks on it all his barbarous humour of wicked invention, and throws its remains aside without even the poor satisfaction of a Christian burial. Who

can need sympathy more than an author in such a case? But there is no more mercy in the world for him than there is milk in a male tiger.

Yet in the conclave of ten which met in the cramped back parlour in the Strand, the murdered poet found men who had suffered aforetime, and had known the joy of resurrection. The man in the corner tossed the light quilllets of the brain hither and thither, but he aimed them not at the unsuccessful. He had himself tried to stay the tempest, and had written that the book was not so bad after all. Had the poet known him as the dealer of that unkindest cut of all, he would have slain him in his corner before the spectral nine. When he entered and took his seat amongst them, they greeted

him more kindly than of old, and made more of a comrade of him. Lorrimer, who was talking, made a point of addressing him personally, so as to make a feature of him.

‘Your worship was the last man in our mouths. You remember being here one day, long ago now, when I sang the praises of Miss Churchill?’

‘Perfectly,’ replied the poet. ‘I went with you to the final dress rehearsal, and you put into my hands the letter she left behind her.’

‘I was saying so as you came in. That brings the history up to the end of her connection with the stage. Well, everybody knows what a mystery that looked. Not a soul had an idea where she disappeared to.’

‘I know,’ said the poet. ‘I met her

afterwards. She married a fellow named Tregarthen—disreputable fellow who was dismissed the army; insisted on using such fearful language at the mess-table that the other men wouldn't stand him. Well-connected fellow—I believe he's the last of one of the oldest families in Cornwall—but an awful blackguard, so I'm told.'

'Well, upon my word,' said Lorrimer, 'that's a pretty sort of cove to forbid his wife with his dying breath to go upon the stage.'

Mr. Lorrimer's theory carried him that length.

'Dead?' said the poet. 'Is he dead? Well, she's very attractive and quite young. With such a fortune as he could leave her she won't be long without a husband.'

‘Fortune!’ echoed Lorrimer. ‘She hasn’t any fortune. Bless your soul, she’s as poor as a church mouse. Living in a boarding-house—and a dam seedy boarding-house it is, I can tell you—just off the Strand.’

‘I suppose he made ducks and drakes of everything,’ said the poet. ‘My father had a place at Gorbay years ago, and they had a good deal of land in those days—the Tregarthens. Poor thing!’

The poet held no malice, except for his reviewers. Outside his verses he was a harmless man, and had not the least desire to hurt anybody. He had long ago been able to forgive Mrs. Tregarthen for snubbing him, and he was sensitive to a tale of beauty in distress—as a poet ought to be.

Lorrimer told his story of the interview between himself and the lost star of the stage, and everybody agreed that the dead Tregarthen of Mr. Lorrimer's imagination was the last sort of person who had a right to have his dying wishes gratified. When the conclave parted and the poet walked into the Strand, he dived into the street Lorrimer had mentioned and read the door-plates with some little trouble in the gathering dusk until he came upon the boarding-house. He remembered the brilliant and stately creature who had swept so haughtily away from his impertinent presence at Tregarthen, and felt unhappy to think that she was housed in this frowsy caravanserai. He had but seen her twice, and she had certainly ill-treated him, and yet he felt such

an interest in her as few women had inspired him with. She was poor and in grief and a widow. Mr. Ronald Marsh left the street slowly and sadly, and thought how full of trouble was the world, and mused on Death and the Reviewers, and such grisly themes.

It was no business of any man's, but two or three people who knew him caught the poet at odd times in the act of leaving that street after dark, with a certain marked air of furtive adventure. If any hope of seeing Mrs. Tregarthen again drew him that way, or if he merely went to moon in the neighbourhood because it induced that curious sense of the abolition of moral responsibilities with regard to language which is so valuable to poets, would seem to be uncertain. When you relax your brains for

the manufacture of verses, and allow them to flow out where they will, diffuse and devious, a remembrance of some person of the opposite sex serves as a sort of centre for the tides, dissipating or rallying them quite apart from the will of the patient.

It had grown into winter time, and the rainy night had fallen upon London, and the streets had a fungous odour in the rain, and were inch-deep in mud, when the poet, bearing his demon with him, slashed past the lodging-house—top-booted, with his sombrero picturesquely flapping and his long cloak picturesquely flying in the wet wind which blew up from the river. He was scathing a reviewer, and would have thrown his annual income into Thames to have secured a stately rhyme to ‘viper ;’ but just as

he passed the boarding-house door it opened, and the merest glance assured him that Mrs. Tregarthen stood there attired for the street. A second or two later the wind caught the door, and it slammed noisily. The poet moderated his headlong pace, paused and turned. Mrs. Tregarthen's tall and graceful figure went fluttering Strandwards.

Ronald Marsh knew perfectly well that it is not counted a gentlemanly thing to follow a lady without her knowledge and consent, and he piqued himself on being a gentleman almost more than on being a poet. He did not think it honourable to dog a lady's footsteps, and it was no affair of his to know whither she was bound on foot on a night so inclement. Whilst he thought thus he followed Mrs. Tregarthen, regulating his

own pace to hers. This was shameful, and he turned away, but only for a second. When he looked again the fluttering figure was gone, though there was no opening on the street to right or left, and he had seen her outlined like a wavering silhouette against the Strand lights a mere fraction of time ago. A special puddle lay abreast of where he had last seen her, noticeable because it caught the lights of the bright street beyond and reflected them like a mirror laid aslant. He kept his eyes upon this landmark, and, though as he grew closer the light faded from it, he knew that he had not lost the place. He was sure—with a keener pang than anything but the reviews had hitherto caused him—that he had not lost the place; for where the wind-beaten

figure had disappeared stood a swinging door, and above it the triune globes of gold. Poverty's storm drum is mast-high all the year round.

The young man drew into the shadow of a corner, and watched the door, with no memory of his scruples of half a minute back. It was not the business of the moment to analyse the motives which moved him, but they were nine-tenths made up of pity and a helpless wish to be of service. He had to wait in the wind and rain for full five minutes before the swinging door opened, and Mrs. Tregarthen reappeared, heavily veiled, and ran against the beating wind to the door of the boarding-house, where she paused to use a latch-key, and then disappeared swiftly.

At the thought of youth, and grace, and genius brought to such a pass as this, the poet was grieved, and he walked miserably away, not seeing how to be of use, but burdened with a heavy sense of the necessity for doing something. A man may be brimful of conceit and may write bad verses, and yet have a good heart. He walked home and dressed for dinner, and dined moodily with people who laughed at him for being moody. Then he went, at a late hour, to the theatre, and there encountered Lorrimer. He had something of a struggle with himself before he could take the manager into confidence; but at length he did it, swearing him to secrecy. Lorrimer heard him through with an expression of face bordering on the distracted.

‘If I don’t find out something about this by and by,’ said the manager, ‘I shall go mad. Come here, into the box-office. Look at this advertisement in the *Times*. Where are we? Oh, here it is. Read that.’

The poet read—

‘Miss Churchill is requested to claim her private fortune at the hands of Messrs. Lowe & Carter, of Clement’s Inn.—A. T.’

‘Now,’ said Lorrimer, when Ronald Marsh looked wonderingly up at him, ‘what the Moses is it all about? These people, Lowe and Carter, were the lawyers who paid me my claim against Miss Churchill. She had money then, or the means of getting money, or she couldn’t have left the stage and have paid my claim. Now, here she is

in financial difficulties, running to the pawn-broker's—and I'll swear she's a lady, born and bred—and all the while she's asked in the newspapers to go and claim her private fortune ! Because you know it's as plain as the nose on your face that it's the same woman.'

'Who said Tregarthen was dead?' said the poet. 'These are his initials.'

'I said he was dead,' returned Lorrimer. 'She told me so.' He was quite persuaded that she had done so. 'It must be the same woman. Anyway, I'll tell you what I can do. I can go and see the lawyers and tell 'em her address. We have done business together already. Since I saw this advertisement I've had the curiosity to turn over the file of the *Times*, and I find that

it's been published every day for nearly four months. I wish I could persuade her to come back to the boards. Unless her private fortune is a precious big one, I'd guarantee to double it for her. She's a perfect gold mine. There never was such a Rosalind, and I don't believe there ever will be such another.'

The sense of romance and mystery which seemed to grow up about Mrs. Tregarthen helped to keep her in Ronald Marsh's mind, and he began to haunt the street she lived in, and, during hours of darkness, to prowl about its neighbourhood, until the police set watchful eyes upon him and booked him in their own minds as a person with an unlawful purpose.

Lorrimer wrote to the lawyers, asking if

the Miss Churchill advertised was identical with the Miss Churchill in whose behalf they had done business aforetime. Receiving an answer in the affirmative, he supplied them with her address, and waited to hear more. No news reached him until the poet turned up one evening, with greatly disturbed aspect, and announced that Mrs. Tregarthen and the little girl who lived with her had left the boarding-house and had taken new lodgings in a street off the Tottenham Court Road—that both she and the child were poorly and scantily dressed, and that the house in which she now lived was fit only for the occupation of the very poor. Lorrimer went to the lawyers, begging to be enlightened. They, inquiring courteously into his right to claim enlighten-

ment and finding it to be non-existent, respectfully declined to satisfy him. He retreated, and had new conferences with the poet, who was melodramatically gloomy, and let fall deadly hints about villany, and betrayal, and the wild justice of revenge, perplexing Lorrimer still more. At last, spurred by his lofty hopes of the actress's possible future and his own, and moved at least in part by the promptings of good nature, and haled towards a solution of the mystery by a very cable of curiosity, he leaped impatiently into a hackney carriage, and set out in search of Mrs. Tregarthen. He had her address from the poet.

Sun-blistered paint, years old, upon the door ; thick veils of dust upon the windows ;

a mere well of an area, with rusted railings round it : doorsteps cracked and sunken at the centre.

‘She might have had a house in Park Lane by this time,’ thought Lorrimer, as he scanned the place, ‘and yet she lives here. What was her private fortune, I wonder? The last curse of a dying mother-in-law? It looks like it.’

When he tugged at the bell-pull, a long piece of rusted iron came out from the doorpost with a reluctant creak. He pushed it back again, and tapped the blistered door with his gloved knuckles. A slatternly woman came into the well of an area, wiping her hands upon a dirty apron, and, having inspected him, went leisurely into the house again, and after a pause which

seemed long to his impatience, opened the front door an inch or two, and regarded him afresh in unpromising silence.

‘Good morning,’ said Lorrimer, with smooth politeness. ‘You have a lady staying here, ma’am, I believe, and I should be extremely obliged if I might be allowed to see her. We are old friends, and I have been informed that she is in some distress.’ Lorrimer was gorgeous as to his attire, and his manner was almost monarchical.* As he spoke he drew a half-crown from his waistcoat pocket, and holding it delicately between his finger and thumb, like a duke performing a playful conjuring trick, dropped it into the woman’s palm, which came automatically to receive it. The woman opened the door a little wider.

‘Do you mean Mrs. Tregarthen, sir?’ she asked.

‘That,’ said Mr. Lorrimer, ‘is the lady’s name.’

The woman opened the door still wider, and permitted him to enter. A ragged oil-cloth clung somehow to the floor, but the unwashed stairs were carpetless.

‘What name shall I say, sir?’ asked the landlady.

‘Say Mr. Lorrimer,’ returned the manager; but he followed closely on her heels as she mounted the stairs, and was resolved to present himself before he could be refused an audience. He could not have told then or afterwards whether pity, curiosity, or managerial enterprise drew him on more strongly. Either the first or last

would have been in itself enough, and the three together were irresistible.

The woman paused on a dark landing, and knocked at a door invisible to Lorrimer.

‘Come in,’ said a voice in reply; and the knocker entered.

‘A gentleman to see you, ma’am,’ she said, in a voice for which Lorrimer could have thrown her down the stairs. He knew one side of the world and of human nature pretty well, and he read the hypocrisy and propitiation of the carneying tone. He could have sworn that the woman habitually bullied her lodger.

‘Tell him,’ said Mrs. Tregarthen in a frightened voice, ‘that I cannot see him. I——’

Lorrimer was in the room already, and had taken in half its sordid details at a glance. A bed in a corner, with a little bundle lying on it; a chair; a table; a few dresses hanging on a wall from which the paper dripped in moist festoons; a rusty grate, empty.

‘Madam,’ said the manager advancing, ‘you must not decline to see me. I come as a friend.’

Pity had the better of managerial enterprise for a moment at least, and the room went dim to Lorrimer’s eyes. Mrs. Tregarthen, in a shabby black dress which made her pale face look paler than it was, stood (in the attitude in which she had arisen from her seat on the side of the bed) with both hands on the table, her whole figure

shrinking like that of any weak wild creature when suddenly alarmed.

‘Oblige me by leaving us, if you please,’ said Lorrimer to the landlady. The woman reluctantly withdrew, and Lorrimer held the door open to watch her down the stairs. He could not help being stagey, for use is second nature, but he was thoroughly in earnest when he turned: ‘My poor dear creature—don’t mind me talking to you in this way—I’m old enough to be your father—my poor dear creature, what on earth do you mean by living in a place like this?’ She had only moved to breathe since his first entrance to the room, and her eyes said, ‘Leave me for pity’s sake!’ if ever eyes said anything. But, as he paused, the bundle on the bed began to move, and a

feeble cry came from it. She darted to it, peeled from it, swiftly and delicately, the shawl which enfolded it, and took it to her arms. A baby. 'Oh, Lord!' groaned the manager, with the tears in his eyes again, 'how can you have the heart to throw away such prospects as you have, when you've got such claims upon you?'

She looked at him almost wildly, and walked up and down the room rocking the crying child in her arms. He thought the look defiant, and broke out anew.

'Any grown-up creature has a right to starve and be wretched, but, by God! ma'am, nobody has a right to ill-treat a baby. It's criminal, Mrs. Tregarthen; it's nothing less than monstrous. How dare you throw away that child's chances in the

world?' Lorrimer trod the boards with the air of amazed virtue.

'How dare you speak so to me?' she demanded, pausing suddenly in her agitated walk about the room. 'What right have you here?'

'For God's sake, don't be angry with me!' said Lorrimer, descending from his place of moral pride. 'I'm the best friend you have in the world; I am indeed.' He was no longer the representative of virtue amazed, but had become the attached old family servitor, and pleaded with the last wilful descendant of the race he loved.

At this moment there came a rap at the door, and the landlady appeared, bearing a bulky parcel and a letter.

'This is underpaid, ma'am,' said the

landlady, laying the parcel on the table, ‘and the postman says there’s tenpence on it.’

Lorrimer drew a shilling from his waistcoat pocket.

‘There, there, my good woman; don’t interrupt us again, if you please.’ He walked to the window and looked out upon the street. ‘Pray look at your letters, Mrs. Tregarthen, and excuse me for being here at all.’

He saw that she had glanced anxiously at the parcel, which looked as if it enclosed a box of some sort. She obeyed him without a word, and he heard every movement she made as she uncorded the packet. Then he heard the tearing of the envelope about the letter, and the rustle of the paper, as it shook in her hand. There was nothing to look at in the street except a mangy cat

who stalked a town sparrow, and missed the bird by a hair's breadth when she made her final spring. It began to strike Lorrimer that Mrs. Tregarthen was a long while silent, and when, at last, he turned round, he raised a yell of dismay, for the poor lady had fallen back upon the bed, and lay there in a dead faint, with the baby still in her lap. She looked so thin and pale and quiet as she lay there, that the manager, who was a bachelor, and knew nothing of women and their weaknesses, took her for dead, and rushed to the door with a tremulous call for the landlady. That good creature despatched him for brandy, and, he being gone, she proceeded very calmly to examine the contents of the packet and the letter. The packet contained a prodigious quantity

of manuscript and nothing else. From the letter the landlady gathered (she could just read) that Messrs. Bilge and Barker regretted that they could not see their way to the publication of ——. A step on the stair warned her of the visitor's return.

‘Look up, there’s a dear creatur’, said the landlady in audible solicitude. ‘Ah, that’s it, my pore darlin’. You’ll be nicely by and by.’

Lorrimer sweated with anxiety whilst the landlady poured a few drops of brandy through the patient’s lips, but in a few minutes Mrs. Tregarthen began to move and moan, and to click her teeth together, and then he was ordered from the room, and paced to and fro upon the fragmentary oil-cloth in the hall for the space of half an hour.

‘How is she?’ he asked, in a whisper, when the woman at last came down stairs.

‘She’s had a good cry, pore dear,’ said the landlady, breathing neat brandy at him; ‘and now I’ve persuaded her to lie down. She’d better not be disturbed again for a hour or two.’

‘Of course not. Of course not,’ said Lorrimer, fidgetting with his watch-chain. ‘She has been very hard up, I’m afraid?’

‘Owes me three pound thirteen shillin’ and sixpence for rent,’ returned the landlady, ‘and being but a pore woman myself, though with a feeling heart, I could not deny her nothing, and candles of a night extravagant.’

Lorrimer was unhinged by the events of the morning, and for the moment he was half inclined to satisfy the landlady’s claim

upon the spot ; but, not having taken a final leave of his business senses, he decided against that course.

‘ Whatever the lady owes,’ he said, ‘ shall be paid.’ He drew his purse from his pocket, and the landlady’s eyes glistened. ‘ Get her,’ he said, slowly and thoughtfully, with a half-sovereign between his thumb and finger, ‘ get her something nice and tempting and nourishing against the time she wakes. No. Never mind, I won’t trouble you. I’ll get it myself, and bring it round in two hours’ time.’

He was gone, and the landlady was staring after him with the look the lean cat had cast after the plump escaping sparrow a while before.

Lorrimer was driven to Oxford Street,

and on the way he used much terrible language without particular application. He had pity enough to fill him to the brim, and curious bewilderment enough, and (when it could beat out the others) managerial enterprise inflated him. For each of these profane language seemed to furnish the only escape-pipe, and the manager's speech would have been appropriate to a deep-dyed villain bent on murder. He halted the carriage at a shop door, alighted, entered, and bought jellies and preserves, drove further and bought wine, drove further and bought fruit, a goodly pile, and a double handful of sweet-smelling country blossoms.

‘Damme!’ said Lorrimer, as he sat in the hackney carriage and surveyed these purchases. ‘I’ll win the jade’s heart. I’ll

make her act. I'll make her so grateful that she can't refuse me.'

A brilliant idea struck him, and he arrested the coach once more. He entered a shop, and when, after the lapse of some two or three minutes, he came once more upon the street, he wore the smile of a man who has just said checkmate to opposition. He unfolded the tissue paper which wrapped his latest purchase.

'That ought to touch a mother's heart,' he said, surveying it admiringly. 'Real coral. Real silver bells, and the finest india-rubber to be had for love or money.'

He took all his purchases to the shabby house in the street off the Tottenham Court Road, and he waited with such patience as he could command until Mrs. Tregarthen was

reported to be awake, and he could be again admitted to her room.

‘A little trifle of jelly,’ said Lorrimer, balancing the preparation. ‘Calves-foot jelly, my dear madam—a most nourishing article. Pray try a little. A glass of port. I am never to be taken at a disadvantage. I carry a pocket corkscrew. Try that, madam. I guarantee it excellent. A little trifle for the baby, Mrs. Tregarthen. I am a bachelor myself, but I am told that children value such gauds.’

The baby stretched out her hand for the bauble, and Lorrimer surrendered it. The sense of his own goodness of heart was too much for him, and his eyes became so moist that he had to retire to the window, where he blew his nose and waved his pocket-

handkerchief with an air of great nonchalance. But Mrs. Tregarthen knew why he had retired, and she herself began to cry out of weakness and despair and gratitude, and Lorrimer blew his nose with violence, as if he were aggravated with it, and had a spite to wreak upon it. His emotion and his friendliness won upon the lonely woman's heart, and by and by he began to pour out golden promises upon her. She was silent for a long time, but at last he grew so warm that he asked her the one question in his mind.

‘How do you hope to live at all unless you take the chances you have?’

‘I thought,’ she said, ‘that I could make a living by writing.’

The gesture she used sent his glance to

the table. He approached and picked up the letter which lay there, and then turned over a folio or two of the great pile of manuscript.

‘Ah! he said. ‘And you find you can’t? Well, my dear madam, here lies El Dorado before you. You have only to say Yes to my proposal, and you can leave this wretched hole at once, and go to the best hotel in London. You can dress like a princess, and you can command comfort and refinement for your child. Oh, madam, madam,’ cried the manager, with tears in his voice, ‘for your child’s sake do not let me plead with you in vain.’

If Lorrimer were half a humbug, she at least was all in earnest in her thoughts.

‘Yes,’ she answered; ‘I will do what

you wish. I will go back to the stage again. For the child's sake.'

Next day saw her once more attired like a lady, and located in sumptuous private apartments. Lorrimer was here, there, and everywhere, spreading the glorious news.

CHAPTER VII.

WHILST Mrs. Tregarthen was afflicting herself with unnecessary miseries, her husband was suffering from griefs less easily to be avoided. The copy-books say that Innocence is Bold, and it is one of the conventional arguments against a Suspect that he runs away. As a matter of course the running away is merely an indication of character, and has nothing to do with guilt or innocence. The shrug of surprised pity at the benighted accuser, the placid mien of assured innocence, the martyr's resignation

and the saint's forgiveness, are things familiar in our courts of justice, and are displayed there, never by the innocent, but daily by the branded rascals who use them as a part of stock in trade. But it takes much experience to kill a phrase, and Innocence is still Bold in the copy-books and the apprehension of the unworldly.

Mrs. Tregarthen's flight, her foolish innocent letter, and her continued silence were enough to prejudice the most trusting of men against her. The real motive for flight was absurdly inadequate to anybody who could survey the case dispassionately. To Tregarthen its inadequacy seemed exaggerated, because he, better than any outsider could have known it, knew his own readiness to forget and forgive the small

deceit of which his wife had been guilty—if that were all. The agonised letter, with its talk about ‘guilty deceit’ and ‘unknown past,’ seemed to point to more than the wickedness of a month or two upon the stage; and when week after week dragged by, and brought no news from the runaway, Tregarthen’s first suspicions and fears were bit by bit confirmed, until they settled into dreadful certainty.

He dismissed and paid the architect and the builder, and brought the works at Tregarthen to a close. Blocks of stone, rough or trimmed, barks of timber, mounds of mortar, and tracts of trodden lime defaced the grass before the old mansion, and were left there unheeded, a visible sign of hopes abandoned. A new unfinished wall or two

mocked the ruins, and the whole place was desolate with the signs of raw repair. Tregarthen left the house in which he had resided during his brief married life, and went back to the home of his fathers.

As may be guessed, the whole countryside was alive with speculation. Where everybody was equally ignorant, it was natural that there should be many who were the sole repositories of truth ; and it was equally natural that all the versions set about by these enlightened people should differ. But howsoever they differed in detail, it was remarkable to notice how they agreed in the main point. The old story against Tregarthen revived and took additions to itself, and it was settled by common consent that he had done something dread-

ful, and that Mrs. Tregarthen had been compelled to desert him. Some of the hungrier after melodrama found shivery hints of murder in the story, and dropped dark sayings about convenient caves on Tregarthen Island.

In Tregarthen's mind his wife's flight was a thing of long ago before a somewhat obvious reflection occurred to him. She had given him her fortune to pay for the repairs of the old house, and he had no right to retain it. From the moment when he thought of this the money seemed to burn him, and he went off in hot haste to London. Messrs. Lowe and Carter, of Clement's Inn, had been his wife's solicitors, and he naturally applied to them. The senior partner was a man of genial aspect, not at all legal in

his looks; an elderly man, with a boyish frankness of manner and a smiling eye.

Tregarthen told his story with a savage brevity.

‘My wife for reasons of her own has left me. You know that she made over to me the whole of her own fortune.’

‘In spite of my advice,’ said the lawyer.

‘Precisely. I am here to return it. If you have no present knowledge of her whereabouts——’

‘None in the world.’

‘You may advertise, requesting her to apply to you, and saying that her fortune lies in your hands. If you will execute the necessary instruments, I will sign them before leaving town.’

‘You wish the transfer to be absolute and unconditional?’

‘Absolute and unconditional. Be good enough not to mention my name in the advertisement. She will respond to the name of Miss Churchill.’

‘Her stage name,’ said the lawyer, ‘before she married.’

‘You knew that?’ said Tregarthen, looking darkly at him.

‘We knew that. Certainly. We arranged her father’s affairs, and were in occasional communication with her until a few months ago. Excuse me, Mr. Tregarthen. Men in my profession sometimes hear a good deal of domestic discomforts, and sometimes succeed in patching up a difficulty.’

‘I shall not ask your mediation in this case, sir,’ Tregarthen answered. ‘I shall be obliged if you will delay me as little as possible. I have no other business in London.’

He did not leave a pleasant impression on the lawyer’s mind ; and if he had known it or had cared to know it, he had a disagreeable impression to clear away to begin with. The lawyer had heard Tregarthen’s unfortunate regimental story from the one quarter in which it was likely to be reviewed with the least mercy. Colonel Pollard was a client of Messrs. Lowe and Carter’s, and when the Colonel told a story he had a knack of telling it to his own credit. In his narrative Tregarthen shone as a rowdy and a traducer of the sex, a roué, a boaster, and a blackguard.

The necessary documents were drawn up and signed, the advertisement was prepared and inserted, and Tregarthen went back to his island. Before he left town he was asked one question by the lawyer.

‘Do you desire to entrust me with any message to Mrs. Tregarthen in case the advertisement should reach her, and she should apply to us?’

‘None,’ said Tregarthen. His heart was sore, and he was weary of the world. There was no man in England more unhappy, and the very necessity of the case forbade him to repose confidence in any man.

He went back and lived almost alone, and loathed the world. There was no honour in man and no truth in woman, and he had learned this bitter creed by ex-

perience. To uplift a voice for Honour was to call down ruin; to love was to be betrayed; to be blameless meant that the human rarity who dared it should be shunned and hated.

For a long time his books were charmless, and day by day his heart's auditor added Despite to Hatred, and found the sum total to be Misery. After a pause he learned that the lawyers had by chance discovered Mrs. Tregarthen, and that she had refused to touch a penny of the money from his hands. This might have puzzled him if he had been in the humour to be puzzled by anything. As it was, he wrote icily back that the money was none of his, but hers, and that she might please herself about accepting or refusing it. He at least had no

claim upon it. The men of law wrote once more, saying that Mrs. Tregarthen had again disappeared, and asking for instructions. He had none to give, and Miss Farmer's fortune lay at interest therefore and remained unclaimed.

The blustering spring was back again, and March was wilder than it had been for many a year. For three days one tremendous gale blew from the west, and, gathering strength in the great ocean spaces, poured such a tide upon the coast as had scarcely been matched within the memory of living men. Storms of sleet and rain swept over the island, and communication with the mainland was impossible. It pleased Tregarthen to be thus shut out from the world, and the savage isolation the tempest brought

him was in rare consonance with his mood. The milder aspects of nature had ceased to attract him, but this mad mingling of the elements drew him continuously abroad, and he spent hours upon the western rocks when he could hardly stand against the wind, and could not look to windward for an instant.

On the last night of this prolonged tempest the Atlantic rollers fell with such force and volume that they cast stones as large as a man's head forty or fifty yards inland. The east was as black as ink already, and the west was a gruesome grey, when Tregarthen (clinging with both hands to the wet surface of a boulder which lay three hundred paces from the tidal line, and taking his last look at the sea-race as it went foaming back from the crags upon his

right) saw a sudden tongue of light flash out from the darkness, and heard, or thought he heard, a second or two later, the heavy boom of a gun. Crouching behind the boulder, and so sheltering his eyes from the wind, he could dimly make out the form of a great vessel, and just as he was sure of her he saw a second tongue of light flame out from her, but this time, though he listened with all his soul, the gun was dumb in the prodigious noises of the sea. Next, he lost her for a minute in the gloom, and found her again by a third tongue of flame. Every second of that dreadful minute had brought the fancied sound of the gun's voice to his ears.

Each flash was nearer than the last, and he could see that the ship was sweeping

helplessly on shore. He made his difficult and dangerous way towards her, sometimes sheltered by the broken ground, but oftener so beaten by the wind that he could but crawl upon his hands and knees. All the time, at intervals which seemed incredibly apart from each other, the noiseless lightning shot from the vessel's side. Whenever the inequalities of the ground hid her from him he fancied he could hear the gun boom and boom and boom, but whenever he saw the flash the gun was dumb. He came breathless and panting upon the northern rocks and could make out the lines of the hapless ship more clearly. There was no shelter for her on the leese of the island, for, as Tregarthen knew, the sea was running there like a mill race magnified a myriad times. She drifted

with huge lurches towards this channel, and Tregarthen raging with pity and helplessness tore along the rocks. If he could he would have cast himself upon the ground and have seen no more until all was over, but the fascination of horror was upon him, and he was as powerless to resist it as he was to save a life aboard the vessel. She was in sight now continually, and he ran down the broad grass platform with the wind at his back, and kept alongside at a distance of little more than three hundred yards. What with the dashing spray and the wind and the gloom, he could not make out a soul on board, but the flash spoke twice more to his helpless heart, and then the great craft seemed resigned to die in darkness, and even to leap at her doom, as despairing men have been known to do.

The score of men, women, and children who, apart from Tregarthen's household, made up the sole population of the island, were clustered on the northern rock above the Sea Gate. Tregarthen's housekeeper, maid, and man-servant were there also, and when he came amongst them they were all staring at the fated ship. Against the opposite rocks she scarcely showed at all, and she was as often fancied as seen; but now, in a strange way, the gloom began to lighten, as gauze after gauze of cloud was torn from the higher skies, and the moon showed through, at first in a mere broadly-dispersed but feeble gleam, but finally shining through a clear rift with a star or two about her.

‘There’s where she’ll break!’ said one

old sea-dog, pointing to the southern wall of the Sea Gate. He roared the words, but only one man heard him in the howling of the wind and sea.

‘You’m right,’ said the neighbour to whom he spoke. ‘The race sets terrible off Gorbay Head.’

‘See her acomin’ now,’ cried a third, seizing Tregarthen by the arm.

The whole force of the main tide set westward. To the north-west of the island juts out a promontory four miles long and as many broad, and when a west wind blows upon this coast the chief force of the current makes for the narrow passage between Gorbay Head and Tregarthen. Gorbay forms an irregular semicircle almost due east of the island, and the tide, sweeping

past the southern end of Tregarthen, raves round this arc until the narrower current meets it, when it turns and the two break together upon the southern Sea Gate wall. The engines were never built which could fight a ship's way against that awful race when the Atlantic swells it with a storm from the west, though at other times Gorbay is a sheltered harbour.

Between the Head and the island the opposing currents caught the ship, and spun her twice or thrice in a wild circle, and then she came bowling down, swift and steady, as if there were a breeze abeam and every stitch of canvas had been set.

Everybody with one consent ran for the mouth of the Sea Gate, though they turned their backs upon the ship to do it, and, after

a hurried clamber down the wet rocks, they stood upon the sand and watched the channel, and waited for the end. In spite of her broken masts, and the tangle of spars and cordage which encumbered her deck, she looked stately as she swept into sight and made for death almost at the watchers' feet. No ear on shore heard her when she struck. She touched the rock, and it seemed to have power to melt her. She fell back from the climbing seas and flying foam, and her ponderous bows had vanished. She drove forward again, and retired again, and again drove forward, and fell to pieces softly, melted away, dissolved, as if no force were used at all. The shriek and groan of severing timbers were no more heard than the cry of severing soul and body.

Those on shore who had the heart to look saw two or three wretches leap from the deck into the boiling waters, and two or three others clinging here and there, until the ship had broken on the rock like a cloud upon a cloud.

As the vessel first touched the rock the moon was shrouded, and as she melted away the light grew again. Whilst the watchers stood with aching hearts, a sudden volume of water poured into the narrow gate and drove them back. When it fell again, reluctantly, as if its liquid fingers clutched at the sand, it left a fragment of a spar behind it, and almost before the quickest eye had seen this, another wave fell and hid it. When that wave retired it dragged the spar with it, and rolled it over and over. Tre-

garthen shrieked like a woman ; for there, plain to sight, was a child lashed to the rolling spar. None heard the cry, but all saw the forward dash he made, and all realised the double hope and fear. He had reached the spar, and had wound the fingers of his right hand among the coils of rope which bound the child, when the next wave swept up, and tossed him high, as if he had been a straw. But he held on, and, when the wave cast him to the beach, he dug his left fingers in the sand and tried for a grip with his toes. Hercules would have had no more chance against that raging backwash than a baby, and Tregarthen went dragging down the sandy slope until the advancing wave swept up again, lifted him, rolled him over, and cast him and the spar down to-

gether. The spar fell uppermost, and struck Tregarthen so heavily on the head that, with a great crackle and sparkle of lights before his eyes, he swooned and lay like a stone.

The spar came end-on this time, and one Cornish sea-dog fell on it and gripped it with his might, and a second, falling on his knees behind the first, took him round the loins with knitted fingers, and a third seized the second by the leather belt he wore. The next wave came howling up; but before it had them fairly in its grasp, a fourth had seized the third by the hand, and a fifth the fourth, and when the great monster went grinding back with its reluctant fingers clutching at the sand, the line was sound. Before the sea came again, Tregarthen and the child were out of its

reach ; for the rope had miraculously tangled itself about the rescuer's arm, and when the men dragged at the spar he came with it.

There was no memory of the storm in the mild spring air when Tregarthen next awoke to a knowledge of the world. He was lying in bed in his own room, and the window, which faced to the south, was open, so that he could just hear the gentle chiding of the sea. He lay for a time without a care to remember anything ; but when he tried to move he found head, hands, and limbs marvellously heavy, and he began to be aware that he ached all over. Then he remembered the storm, the shipwreck, and the rescue he had attempted.

‘Is anybody here?’ he asked, in a voice so feeble that he was surprised at it.

His housekeeper’s voice responded with an ejaculation of pious joy, and the old woman was at the bedside in a moment.

‘You know me, sir?’ she said.

‘Yes,’ he answered. ‘I have been ill? Who saved me? Did they save the child?’

‘It was Reuben Pollarth,’ said the housekeeper, ‘went in after you first, sir. But they all helped.’

‘Did they save the child?’ he asked again.

‘The child’s quite safe, sir. Don’t you talk no more now, Mr. Arthur, there’s a dear.’

‘Where is the child? In the house?’

‘Yes, sir, yes,’ returned the old lady.

‘But don’t you talk, dear heart, or you’ll do yourself a mischief.’

‘It was a boy, I think,’ said Tregarthen.

‘Yes, yes, sir, yes,’ said the housekeeper.

‘Here’s your sleepin’ draught, Mr. Arthur.’

‘Bring him here,’ said Tregarthen. ‘No, no!’ moving his eyebrows impatiently at the draught. ‘The boy. Let me see him. Bring him here at once.’

The old lady rustled softly from the room, afraid to deny him longer.

‘The Tregarthens ’ll have their way if they are dying,’ she said to herself. ‘It was their manner always.’ She returned in a moment. ‘I have sent for him, sir.’

Tregarthen made a response with his eyes, and lay still. By and by there was a knock at the door, and the housekeeper, answering it, led into the room a little fellow of six or seven years of age, and set him

where her master could see him. The child was pale, and his cheeks were hollow. He had a profusion of light hair, a shy but pleasant aspect, and large grey eyes.

‘Let him be taken care of,’ said Tre-garthen, in his feeble voice. ‘Bring him to me again to-morrow. A pretty child. Any one else?’

‘No, sir,’ said the housekeeper, with a downward glance at the child.

‘Bring him again to-morrow,’ said Tre-garthen. ‘I am tired.’

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.









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